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Interview with Helen Zelkowitz

Helen Zelkowitz

Naomi Schottenstein

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HELEN ZELKOWITZ

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INTERVIEW WITH HELEN ZELKOWITZ (Part I)

This is the afternoon of November 18, 2003, and we're at Park Towers, the apartment of Eleanore Yenkin, who is Helen Zelkowitz's sister. And my name is Naomi Schottenstein, and I am doing this interview for the Columbus Jewish Historical Society. We're interviewing Helen Zelkowitz, whose home is in Mount Vernon, Ohio, and spends much time in Columbus as we will find out as time goes on. The reason we're interviewing Helen is because of her importance in Mount Vernon, Ohio, and because Helen has a lot of family here in Columbus, which she will fill us in as we go along. Helen, I'm just going to start by asking you your full name.

Zelkowitz: Helen Elizabeth Weiner Zelkowitz

Interviewer: Okay, I'm gonna just have you spell your last name, if you will. Zelkowitz: It begins with a z, and ends with a z. Z-e-l-k-o-w-i-t-z.

Interviewer: Great. What is your Jewish name, Helen?

Zelkowitz: Hinda

Interviewer: Hinda?

Zelkowitz: Sounds strange, but that's it, isn't it Eleanore.

Yenkin: Yes

Interviewer: And, do you know who you were named after?

Zelkowitz: My mother's friend.

Interviewer: A friend of your mother's?

Zelkowitz: That's right.

Interviewer: Friendships were very important during those times. We didn't all have all of our relatives around, and so friends were important.

Zelkowitz: Well I was **the last of eight**, and they ran out of names.

Interviewer: They ran out of names? Okay, I can understand that. Can you tell us

something about the Zelkowitz name? Was that the original name? Zelkowitz: Well, I believe they must have come from Russia, with that type of name, and I really know very little about the Zelkowitz family. I know that my husband's mother was my aunt.

Interviewer: Oh?

Zelkowitz: **I married my first cousin once removed**. So we had no problems because we had the same relatives.

Interviewer: Oh. That's interesting.

Zelkowitz: But, so we were very close it family, and my mother-in-law, like I say, was called Aunt Sarah. So she was a very dear person, and we were extremely fond of her.

Interviewer: Did you grow up in the same town? You and your husband?

Zelkowitz: No, we were born, our family, all were born here in Columbus, Ohio. My husband was born in East Orange, New Jersey, and he got a scholarship to Cornell and went to Cornell. And then they ultimately moved to Columbus, where he finished his law degree at Ohio State. With his brother two, I mean that whole family.

Interviewer: So they came, he came to Columbus to finish school? Was that the purpose? Zelkowitz: Yeah.

Interviewer: And he did have family here.

Zelkowitz: Yeah, well they had moved here, and

Interviewer: Before we go further, I want to make sure we have your husband's name in this.

Zelkowitz: Charles.

Interviewer: Charles?

Zelkowitz: Charles Myer Zelkowitz. And his "Myer" was named after his Grandfather, who was my father's brother. So that's how tight that we were.

Interviewer: Oh.

Zelkowitz: We used to joke, and I told Steven it was his own grandpa that caused us, it was a very close relationship in the family.

Interviewer: It sure was. But again, that wasn't terribly unusual in that period of time, that people ended up with their own cousins, or close family.

Zelkowitz: Well they always did it in the royalty family, that's for sure.

Interviewer: Well, I would say that you are royalty, royalty of Mount Vernon. And your family, you said you were born in Columbus?

Zelkowitz: Right. I was born 1911, and-

Interviewer: What's your birth date? I know you just celebrated...

Zelkowitz: 1911, I was born, so I'm 92 next year.

Interviewer: Yeah, November, but November-

Zelkowitz: November 7th. I was actually born on Election Day. And my name was supposed to be George, because my father was supporting George Carb, who was running for Mayor. And George Carb was defeated, and I came out a girl, so my father had a terrible Election Day. And I guess that's how I got my odd name out of the family.

Interviewer: They were desperate.

Zelkowitz: They weren't expecting it, and I was supposed to be George. I told that to George Voinovich, we had an occasion to be together, and I was telling him that George was a very special name because that's the one I was supposed to have.

Interviewer: Oh that's an interesting story with your name. It, a little bit color, a little bit of color added to your presence here.

Yenkin: And that was George Carb

Zelkowitz: Oh was it George Carb? The mayor.

Interviewer: Tell us about your, your family, your, your siblings.

Zelkowitz: Well, my grandfather came, and my mother. He brought his family from Sweden.

Interviewer: Wait - what was your grandfather's name?

Zelkowitz: Kalman Ephraim London. And he came into New York from Sweden with his family, and he read in the Jewish paper that the Jews in Columbus were dying because they had no leadership. And so he packed up his family, and came to Columbus. And he was the first spiritual leader of the Agudas

Achim Synagogue. And that's why I have established a Scholar in Residence in his name - to honor him, because this was a very important move for the Jews in Columbus. And of course, we were all raised orthodox.

Interviewer: Let me just stop you a minute. Was your, was he a Rabbi? Was he an ordained Rabbi?

Zelkowitz: I don't think so. I don't think that grand-, Eleanore, was he? I don't think so. Yenkin: They called him a reverend, I don't, I don't know if

Zelkowitz: But it wasn't my understanding, but that he was a very learned person. As a matter of fact, later on in life he went back to New York and spent the rest of his days in a, a what, it wasn't a Yeshiva-

Yenkin: A Yeshiva.

Zelkowitz: Was that what it was? I know that he went back to-

Yenkin: It was a house of learning.

Zelkowitz: That's it.

Interviewer: But he spent most of his years here, in Columbus. Is that right?

Nov 7 1911

Zerkowitz: Yes. And then when his family was grown, and, why he went back to New York, and went into, I don't know, the house of learning. That's where he passed away.

Interviewer: I found it interesting that during the holidays there was some conversation about how our synagogue started, and the fact that we're in a new, newly renovated building, and talking about leadership from many years ago. And here, sitting in the congregation, were you two, who are granddaughters of the actual founder of Agudas Achim.

Zerkowitz: That's right.

Interviewer: Yeah, and that was a very critical, I thought, statement that someone should have referred to at the time. But they missed it, but we haven't. It's on record now.

Zerkowitz: Yes, well that's why I established an annual Scholar in Residence, in my grandfather's name.

Interviewer: That's great, beautiful. at are some, well, lets stay with your grandfather

since we're talking about it. What are some memories you have of him? Zerkowitz: Well I really don't have too many memories of grandfather. Do you, Eleanor?

Yenkin: I know, but mother took you to New York when she went to visit her father, and you were about three or four years old. And I never did meet my grandfather.

Zerkowitz: Oh. Well of course I don't remember it.

Interviewer: You wouldn't have remembered that.

Zerkowitz: I'm lucky to know who I am today.

Interviewer: Tell us a little about your mother.

Zerkowitz: Well, my mother was a devoted person to Judaism, and we were raised on that scale. We never rode on the Sabbath, and we never ate away from home. And we ate more tuna fish at Ohio State than anything.

Yenkin: Cheese.

Zerkowitz: And cheese, yes.

Interviewer: Kosher cheese, of course.

But we were never allowed out on Friday night. All the activities took place at Ohio State on Friday. We were not allowed out. And so, the boys all came to our house. So every Friday night, there were seven and eight fellas used to show up from the fraternities. Course they came to see my sister Eleanor, because she was gorgeous. And they-

We taught them how to dance.

That's it. And my brother Abe played the piano, and my mother let us roll up the rug, and she'd bake pies every time, for Friday night, to serve these boys, punch. And, oh, when I think of all those young fellas that used to come. at was that Eleanor?

And they used to put on a major rose program for our parents. My father had them all doing some kind of act.

That's my dad. My dad always went to bed at a reasonable hour, and my mother was the night owl, because Mother took care of all the coming and going on the night on the children. We all had to be in at twelve o'clock. I left, and Eleanor, we always left the movie before we saw the end because we had to be home before twelve o'clock. But-

Well she had control, that's great, and you respected that.

And my mother said prayers three times a day. When Mother moved, her rug in her dining room had, was worn threadbare where she stood three times a day. My father used to call up and say "It's your - can your mother come to the phone, or is she in consultation with the lord?" And so, because Mother, she -n't be interrupted, and the *mishulachim* would show up, and they would come on our front porch, our, we had a huge front porch on Wilson, Wilson Avenue. And they'd come up, and they'd look in the window and they - see mother there, saying her prayers, and they would knock on the window and she would shake her head no. She wasn't interrupting her prayers, and of course then that -

Interviewer: Helen, Helen, just explain to use what *mishulachim* are. I know what they are, and you know, but-

Zerkowitz: Well, they are people that came from Israel with their little bag to collect from Americans. And they would walk all the way down Wilson Avenue and stop at my mother's because they knew that they, it was marked as no question. But Mother had this one man that came in, and Mother always wanted to see their credentials, and she would sit there and read their credentials, just. And she looked at this one, and she said to him "why, you're from Chicago." She said "I'm very sorry, but Chicago is going to have to take care of itself." I thought he was going to have to have resuscitation! It was absolutely wild. That was out. Chicago.

Interviewer: So she screened them carefully?

Zerkowitz: That's right and see because we were raised with eight or ten *pushke* boxes, you know.

keep my
higher

Interviewer: Charity boxes.

Zerkowitz: Yeah.

Yenkin: I still have a couple here

Interviewer: Oh I bet.

Yenkin: You want to see them?

Zerkowitz: My mother had these charity boxes lined up, and they were for the aged, the orphans that, the blind, the handicapped. Whatever it was, Mother had them lined up. And every *Shabbos* they each one had to have something in it. And so, we were raised the importance of charity.

Interviewer: *Tzedaka* is the Jewish way of life.

Zerkowitz: That's right that's it. It was the most important thing. And Mother used to cook food and take it to people, who, some young lady was sick and had children, and we ended up, all three of us girls, going with Mother, to

deliver food. So that, that was the atmosphere that we were raised in. Interviewer: Your, I know your mother was a very strong person. How did your father fit into this picture of traditionalism?

Zerkowitz: My father turned that whole thing over to my mother.

Interviewer: Was he observant though?

Zerkowitz: He claimed Mother, Mother had to take care of the lord. And my dad, my dad had a loan office and my mother was so unhappy because it was open on Saturday.

Interviewer: He had a loan office?

Zerkowitz: Yes.

Interviewer: So you mean, did he loan moneys?

Zerkowitz: Yes that was the business that he was in. On jewelry, and various things. And so-

Interviewer: Would that be like a pawnshop kind of thing?

Zerkowitz: That's right. Yes.

Interviewer: It was a pawnshop?

Zerkowitz: Yes. And it was called, Dad built the building, it had "Weiner" on the building, and of course they've torn it down since. It was on Mount Vernon Avenue.

Interviewer: at was, do you remember the address?

Zerkowitz: 952

Interviewer: There you go, you did remember.

Zerkowitz: So anyhow, the thing that upset Mother was she wanted my father to stay closed on Saturday, and I remember my father saying "if I stay closed on Saturday, I won't have to bother opening up on Monday." And so this became, it, my mother only prayed for my father because she was so unhappy. He had the store open. And we were raised to love horses, because my brother loved horses, and I recall Eleanor-

Yenkin: We raced horses.

Zerkowitz: Yes. You remember when Mother, this Twenty Grand was running, and my, we were having dinner, and Mother didn't want to say anything about it. So when *Shabbos* was over and we found out that Twenty Grand won, Mother said well, that's who she really wanted to tell my brother, but she -n't mention it because it was *Shabbos*.

Interviewer: Oh. It wouldn't be permissible.

Zerkowitz: No, you -n't mention it because they ran on *Shabbos*.

Interviewer: Let me have you tell us about your siblings. Let's start with the first one, and tell us about your family.

Zerkowitz: Well, my sister Tillie was the oldest in our family, and my sister Tillie helped my father in the store, and she was terrific help to Dad. She married Doctor Ziskind.

Interviewer: at was his first name?

Yenkin: Jacob.

Zerkowitz: Jacob Ziskind. And he of course had a medical practice for years, here in Columbus. And then my-

Interviewer: Well wait. Did she have children?

Zerkowitz: And she had children, Susan Portman. And Susan has three sons that are so terrific, her sons. She has Michael, who is a psychologist, and David Portman who is a gynecologist. And then, a-

Yelkin: Joshua

Zerkowitz: Joshua, who graduated from Chicago University in law school. Interviewer: And where do they live?

Zerkowitz: And he is in, Joshua, lives in Israel. He has lived there, and married an Israeli, and has three children. And David Portman quit medical school for a year, and went to Israel to study in a *Yeshiva*, and then went back to medical school at Ohio State. And Michael went to Israel, at, for, and stayed for year at a *Yeshiva*, and he was looking for a wife. Well, he finally found his wife there, and she is from Johannesburg, she had come to Israel, and she is such a lovely person. And so-

Interviewer: Did you, did you ladies go to their wedding?

Zerkowitz: Oh, of course! My sister and I, we went to Johannesburg in a wheelchair, the two of us. Oh my goodness, Sam Portman, Doctor Portman, and Susan each had us in a wheelchair. And we went from airport to airport, and we got to one airport and missed our plane. And, Eleanore you remember when we got to that, and we were on a standby, and there were ten people there, and when they saw us in the wheelchairs they let us go first and that's how we got to the wedding on time.

Interviewer: There were some advantages to being in that wheelchair.

Zerkowitz: Yes that's it. But we had a marvelous trip to Johannesburg.

Interviewer: And where, where do they live? They live in Israel now. Do they? Zerkowitz: No! No, Michael lives here.

Interviewer: Michael lives here?

Zerkowitz: He is employed at the Jewish Family Services. And of course David Portman is on the staff at Mount Carmel East, he's a gynecologist. And Joshua practices law in Jerusalem, and he married an Israeli, whose wife's father is a Rabbi, and they have ten children. So, five boys, and five girls though.

Interviewer: You mean his wife's?

Zerkowitz: His wife came from a family of ten.

Interviewer: -of ten, but they have three?

Zerkowitz: They have three. And anyhow, Susan, my niece Susan, and her husband Sam, they just recently, this July, left permanently to live in Israel. The past

four or five years they have gone to Israel, and had an apartment in Jerusalem, and they would go there for, and stay eight months, and then they maintained a home in Columbus for four months. Well they just recently, this past year, decided that they were going to just come back to visit, for a month. And then-

Interviewer: So they're permanently residing-

Zerkowitz: So they are permanently there. And of course I've visited several times, and my sister and I went to Joshua's wedding in Israel, we're professional wedding-goers.

Interviewer: Yes. Thank goodness those are wonderful things to attend.

Zerkowitz: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell us a little bit about Susan. I know she's very talented.

Zerkowitz: Well Susan is an artist, and she has, Eleanore has a beautiful painting, several of them, here. And I have, since she has, does beautiful work-Interviewer: She does.

Zerkowitz: And so she-

Interviewer: All Judaic background,

Zerkowitz: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Subjects.

Zerkowitz: And she even was commissioned by one of the churches to do a Judaic Painting. And so, anyhow, she had, David has four children, three boys. And he's going, Jake, is going to be *Bar Mitzvah*ed next year. And Susan and Sam, of course, are coming for the *Bar Mitzvah* next May. And so he's going to be thirteen. But then they have three sons, and a little daughter. And she is such a sweet little girl, Rebecca. And then of course, Reba, the, a, Mike's wife from Johannesburg, has two children- Jonathan and Sarah Tova. And then, like I say, Joshua has three, and so Susan has, she gets to see those grandchildren.

Interviewer: Sure, sure. I, you said that Tillie worked with your dad, and-

Zerkowitz: Yes, yes she did. And as a matter of fact when she got married, and by the way, she married her first cousin once removed.

Interviewer: Oh that's interesting.

Zerkowitz: So that's how we are related with the Ziskind family.

Interviewer: Sure.

Zerkowitz: ..., you see. And-

Yenkin: ... Ziskind was our grandmother's sister.

Interviewer: Oh boy that's a close tie.

Zerkowitz: That's it. So-

Interviewer: And those names that begin with Zs.

Zerkowitz: That's right. So anyhow, my sister Tillie used to stay at her husband's office and Doc claimed that she cured the patients before they came in to see him. She cured them out in the reception room.

Interviewer: She did. She had that magic.

Zerkowitz: That's right.

Interviewer: Okay that was your oldest sister. Let's go-

Zerkowitz: Yeah. Then my sister Ruth. My sister Ruth was a great deal like my mother. She observed, she observed orthodoxy to the, and she raised her children the same way. And my sister Ruth and Doc Kanter's family was very religious also, and were orthodox.

Interviewer: What was Ruth's husband's full name?

Zerkowitz: Max Kanter. I don't know what Max's middle name was.

Interviewer: Max. The Kanter spelled with a "C" or a "K"?

Zerkowitz: K.

Interviewer: K.

Zerkowitz: And of course, my sister Ruth has her son, Buzzy Kanter. And-Yenkin: She was beautiful.

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Zerkowitz: And Buzzy Kanter, and then he had a daughter, a sweetie, bless her, Leah. Yenkin: That's my brother Bernard, who Bernie is named after.

Interviewer: Oh. Eleanore is showing us pictures here, of Ruth and her brother, Bernard, and who would that, that's-

Yenkin: Our father and mother.

Interviewer: Your mother and father. How about that. And these pictures are-Yenkin: And our little dog, Bessie.

Interviewer: -beautiful. And the little dog Bessie. And we're looking at a picture of Helen, in her youth. Helen, you were a stunning woman.

Zerkowitz: Yes.

Interviewer: Stunning.

Zerkowitz: Well that's-

Interviewer: Also, and this is your brother-

Yenkin: Our brother Abe.

Interviewer: Abe. Also, Eleanore brought to the table two really antique-y looking *Tzedaka* Boxes, and they're just a treasure.

Yenkin: This is a general office one, -

Zerkowitz: *Pushkes*.

Interviewer: *Pushkes*, *Pushkes*.

Yenkin: and I still give to that, and this one, - ... or a hundred years old.

Zerkowitz: I'm sure they're over a hundred years old. I wonder what this one...

Zerkowitz: This one is from, I think this one is from 1902.

Interviewer: Wow. Oh they're beautiful, and they are really historic. I am also watching this tape, because when it gets way down low, we have to switch. Okay. So we have some interesting artifacts here as well, and the money is spilling out. We don't want that

to happen. Okay. We're talking about Ruth Kanter, we talked about Ruth has a son, Buzzy.

Zelkowitz: And she has a daughter first, Leah Salis. And Leah was married to Doctor Herbert Salis, who was unfortunately killed in a terrible auto accident. And he went out to serve a man who had been hit, and he was sideswiped and killed right on the spot, in front of her house.

Interviewer: I remember that tragedy.

Zelkowitz: Tragedy indeed and she had two children. And David of course, lives in Israel. David went to the *Yeshiva* there, her son David, and he was there for years. And he now has married an, I wonder if Donna Lee was an Israeli. I'm really not we, but they have two children. And so then, and Buzzy has three daughters.

Interviewer: Well wait a minute, Leah has another child too.

Zelkowitz: Oh Esther! Yes, Esther. And Esther is married to Gary Gillette, and Ester is a nutritionist, and Gary is a lawyer. And they have two lovely children. As a matter of fact, her son, Max, plays the violin, and is in the senior class, and he's only eleven. He has a very attuned ear for music. He plays the piano and the violin beautifully. And his little sister, Abby, is so adorable. She sits down and she plays too. She wants her share, -

Interviewer: Wait, I think you have some musical genes in your family, because I know Eleanore is very talented.

Zelkowitz: Yes, Eleanore has a keen ear, she has a musical ear, and this is what Max has. And he is, he came up and played around with my sister's violin. My sister used to play the violin, you know.

Interviewer: Eleanore played the violin too?

Zelkowitz: And my sister Ruth. And my father used to leave the house when Ruth played, because she had a deaf ear. And then he waited for Eleanore to play, and then he'd stay home.

Interviewer: Well that was interesting. Okay. So we've got Leah's family pretty well covered, and, now tell us about Buzzy's family. It's a good thing I know some of your relatives.

Zelkowitz: Buzzy has three daughters, and they're lovely girls, and one lives in, where's she live in? In Oak?

Yenkin: In Colorado.

Zelkowitz: Yes, in Colorado. And she has two children. I think she just had a little girl, and I know she has a son, Adam, and, because they were here for *Pesach*. Interviewer: What's her name?

Zelkowitz: Kim.

Interviewer: Kim? Okay.

Zelkowitz: And his [Buzzy's] daughter Kim, and then he has a daughter Becky. Interviewer: I'm going to stop you on Becky, because I'm going to stop this tape, turn it over. So this is the end of side A of tape 1.

Interviewer: Okay. So we were just talking about Becky.

Zelkowitz: Yes. Becky has two handsome sons. And she is, she was at Ohio State, and she has now gone back to school to get her degree, because she's planning on teaching. And then Buzzy has a third daughter.

Interviewer: Debbie?

Zelkowitz: Oh my lord, ... what?

Interviewer: Is her name Debbie?

Zelkowitz: Debbie. Yes. Thank you.

Interviewer: Two of Buzzy's girls are twins, isn't that comet?

Zelkowitz: Yes, Debbie and Kim were twins.

Interviewer: Okay.

Zelkowitz: And Debbie is in Germany and, with her three boys. And her husband is in the service in Kuwait, or where, Iraq I guess.

Interviewer: In Iraq? Yeah.

Zelkowitz: That's where he's stationed now. And I guess he's going to be there for a year, but he's been gone about six months.

Interviewer: Now Buzzy's married, is he not? He's married.

Zelkowitz: Oh yes. Buzzy's married to a very lovely person, Susan. I don't know what Susan's maiden name was but she's a lovely person. And -

Interviewer: And they live here in Columbus?

Zelkowitz: Yes, yes they do. And of course Buzzy is a practicing attorney, and Sweetie graduated and took, and got her masters. And

a-

Interviewer: Sweetie is Leah's Salis' nickname.

Zelkowitz: Yes, yeah. And Leah is a registered social worker. And Sam, their son Sam, has his Ph.D. in history, and has his degree, his law degree. And Sam I think has three degrees.

Interviewer: Who, Sam is-

Zelkowitz: Sam Kanter.

Interviewer: Okay.

Zelkowitz: Who is the youngest of the three.

Interviewer: Right, okay.

Zelkowitz: And Sam is not married. And, but Sam is a fascinating person, and interested in music. He plays the piano. (Editors note: Sam died in January, 2004) Interviewer: Oh he does.

Zelkowitz: They were all taught it. Sweetie does too. But a-

Interviewer: So that pretty much covers your sister Ruth's family.

Zelkowitz: So that's my sister Ruth's family.

Interviewer: And who's-

Zelkowitz: And then my sister Eleanore's family.

Interviewer: Okay.

Zelkowitz: My sister Eleanore had her first child, was a son, Bernie. And Bernie was president of the Majestic Paint, and has run the company for years. I think he is semi-retired now. And they have just returned from Israel. He is married to Miriam Schottenstein. And they have a beautiful family. And they have their daughter Leslie, and a-

Interviewer: And Leslie is married to-

To Johnny,

Petuchowski.

Petuchowski. Always run into trouble on that. And

Pet-. Wait a minute.

Johnny's father was an outstanding rabbi.

Now let me spell his name. P-e-t-u-c-h-o-w-s-k-i. I think that's how you spell it.

Zelkowitz: I'm willing to settle for that.

Interviewer: We spelled it somewhat phonetically, but I think it's pretty close. Zelkowitz: But, so then there was-

Interviewer: Lets see. And they have a child.

Zelkowitz: And they have a child, Abigail, and Abigail is a very talented little girl. And then, the next daughter, is it Alison is next, and Alison has two gorgeous little girls.

Yenkin: She lives in California.

Zelkowitz: And she is married to a Russian, and it's, it's a most beautiful love story. You know how she went to Russia on a book, a, as a book review, it was a book something that they were having. And the professor said look up so-and-so, and that's who met her at the plane. And she subsequently married him, and, a, and, and Tola, -

Yenkin: Tolia.

Interviewer: Tolia?

Zelkowitz: Tolia.

Interviewer: Katsev. Isn't it, is that correct?

Yenkin: Katsev.

Interviewer: K-a-t-s-e-v?

Yenkin: Anatole. Anatoleit... (Anatolia?)

Zerkowitz: And his, they subsequently brought his mother and father over, and his sister.

Interviewer: I know it was love at first sight with them. In, in, when Alison was still -

Zerkowitz: Yes, ... when Bernard (?) and Miriam went there, you know, it was just fascinating. It was a wonderful story.

Interviewer: And Alison teaches, doesn't she? She's a-

Zerkowitz: Alison has her Ph.D., and so does Leslie. Leslie just recently, I imagine. Yenkin: In education.

Zerkowitz: Yes. And then there is-

Interviewer: And they have two children?

Zerkowitz: Two darling girls.

Interviewer: Libby and Sarah? Libby and Sarah?

Zerkowitz: Oh yes.

Interviewer: They are beautiful.

Zerkowitz: Oh and are they, they're just beautiful.. And then Jonathan, John-Interviewer: Wait, what does Tolia do? at is his occupation?

Zerkowitz: Oh, he is a computer analyst of some kind. And he, they've sent him all over. He's been out of the country, they've sent him all over in his work. Anyhow, then. Jonathan graduated from, I don't remember where Jonathan graduated from.

Yenkin: Was it-

Zerkowitz: Was it Yale?

Yenkin: Yes, yes.

Zerkowitz: I know Bernard graduated from Yale. And, and then he went into, he went into the newspaper business, didn't he Eleanor?

Interviewer: Was he a journalist, or -

Yenkin: A journalist.

Interviewer: And who's Jonathan married to?

Zerkowitz: Oh, he's married to Susan. I don't know her last name, but she's a lovely person. And they have, they have two sons, and they're gorgeous boys. Interviewer: Max and Alex.

Zerkowitz: Is that it?

Interviewer: I just happen to know who they are, since they're my nephews too. Zerkowitz: Oh... cause I -n't remember their names. And then of course there is Bernard's youngest daughter.

Interviewer: Well wait a minute. Now Jonathan, Jonathan lives in-

Zerkowitz: Chicago.

Interviewer: Chicago. Outside of Chicago, I think.

Zerkowitz: Someplace. And, -

Interviewer: Now their youngest.

Zerkowitz: And then Amy lives in New York, and she is married to a young man who is involved in banking of some kind. And Bob-

Yenkin: Putting banks together.

Interviewer: That's Rob, U-s-d-a-n.

Zerkowitz: Yes, yes. I've got it written down someplace, but-

Interviewer: And they have how many children?

Zerkowitz: Oh and they have two boys, -

Interviewer: A boy and a girl.

Zerkowitz: Oh did they have, was that last one a little girl?

Interviewer: Yeah, a little girl.

Zerkowitz: was it? Interviewer: Dora.

Zerkowitz: Oh that's right! Dora! I never forgot that name because I, that's was named after Aunt Dora.

Interviewer: Oh, our Aunt Dora, Dora Abrams.

Zerkowitz: Yes.

Interviewer: And the boy's name is Cole.

Zerkowitz: Yes.

Interviewer: C-o-l-e. Okay. So that covers Miriam and Bernie's family.

Zerkowitz: Yes.

Interviewer: And Eleanore and Eleanore has two daughters. Let's let you fill that in. Zerkowitz: ... a daughter, Sandra. Sandra is married to Herb Levine, and he is an outstanding cardiologist. And a-

Yenkin: In Boston.

Zerkowitz: In Boston, and Linda is in Boston as well. And she works in the most interesting places. She is in some, what is that institute? All I know is that she's helping the handicapped.

Yenkin: And the aged.

Interviewer: She's really covering a lot of territory, isn't she?

Zerkowitz: Yes. And so that is-

Interviewer: Now Sandra has two children?

Zerkowitz: Oh yes.

Interviewer: Sandra?

Zerkowitz: Sandra has Andy and Andrew. He just had a birthday, November 11. And Andy is an entrepreneur. And then she has a daughter.

Yenkin: Rachel.

Zerkowitz: Rachel, and Rachel has two of the most adorable boys. They look like twins, but they're, and they're together, and they love each other, they're two handsome boys. And she's expecting.

Interviewer: Oh she is?

Zerkowitz: In February. So everybody's excited about that.

Interviewer: I have to say that while you're describing these family members, that you, you understand and know them all, and you speak with great passion of them all, so I know that you have a lot of close contact with them. Zerkowitz: Yes, I always have.

Interviewer: They're very fortunate, and so are you, that you're Al in touch. Zerkowitz: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. After Eleanore, who's the next sibling?

Zerkowitz: Well lets see. I guess it must be me.

Interviewer: I think you're pretty close.

Zerkowitz: Although my brother Bernard, you know he was seventeen years old, graduating from highschool, when he went swimming. And the doctor thought he had quinsy, and he ended up having diphtheria, and we all were quarantined, and he died. Misdiagnosed, it was how, it's a tragedy. Anyhow, that was my brother Bernard. And then I was the youngest in the family.

And I married, like I mentioned, my first cousin once removed. We went to Cornell to pick Charles up, and I had never met him. And, so that was my first thing. But the he used to come over with his brother Harold all the time, every Friday night to our dancing spees. And I never knew what he was coming for. My sister used to come up and say, "Oh you've got to get up and get dressed," because I too played basketball on Friday. I was captain of the basketball team, and was worn out, and I'd go to bed after supper. And she'd come up with "Oh, you got to get up, ... the boys are downstairs, there's only us two girls, you got to get up."

Interviewer: So Eleanore was the party girl?

Zerkowitz: Yes. So then I had to get up and get dressed.

Interviewer: Tell us-

Yenkin: ...does that sound very complimentary? Party girl?

Interviewer: Yes it is. I think it is. It's very complimentary. You were a lot of fun, and you still are, Eleanore. Eleanore is sitting here helping us a little with this interview. Helping us a lot, actually. So, when where you, when did you finally decide that you were going to get married? How did that come out?

Zelkowitz: Well, my husband, having been born in a small town, he wanted to practice in a small town. This was in 1932, and of course what happened in 1929, when the crash came, and Charles -n't find a law office that was hiring here. So he had a friend who lived in Mount Vernon who said that the judge had died, in Mount Vernon, and he thought it would be a good opening. Unfortunately, when Charles got there, we found out that the judge's practice had been dead for quite a long time, along with him as well. And so, anyhow, Charles took in a quarter during the first year, and he got that from Sam Epstein, for notarizing a paper.

Interviewer: A quarter. That's twenty-five cents.

Zelkowitz: That's right. That was his intake for the first year. My father and his father subsidized us when we moved to Mount Vernon. We were paying eighteen dollars a month rent. I thought it was exorbitant, and I had never lived in a rented home. My father, we always owned our own home, and we had

tenants to take care of, here I was, in an apartment, a rented apartment, paying the exorbitant fee of eighteen dollars a month.

Interviewer: In Mount Vernon, Ohio?

Zelkowitz: Mount Vernon. Yeah.

Interviewer: So tell, well, when where, so what was your wedding date?

Zelkowitz: Well we were married February the thirteenth, 1933. And the reason we were married on the thirteenth is that my husband had a case in West Virginia, and my father had a stroke, and my mother was busy, of course, taking me to the *Mikvah*, because I told her we were going to West Virginia to get married. And we got married in West Virginia, over a bridge table, by Rabbi Therman. Got his, my marriage certificate after that.

Interviewer: Who else was at your wedding?

Zelkowitz: The Rabbi, and, -

Interviewer: No family members?

Zelkowitz: No. No, we were in West Virginia, and I remember my father, husband took out five dollars and gave it to the Rabbi. And he said, the Rabbi said, "Well," he said, "You know, this happens to me all the time." He said, "People take out these big fat wallets, and then hand me a couple dollars." And Charles said to him, "well I want you to know this is coming from a very lean pocketbook. So anyhow, we were married in West Virginia for five dollars.

Interviewer: That's-

Zelkowitz: Over a bridge table.

Interviewer: Well that worked, anyhow. It-

Zelkowitz: So it only goes to prove one thing- it doesn't make too much difference how you were wed, what matters is-

Interviewer: Was there a celebration at another time? A party? No?

Zelkowitz: No, no we didn't. It would just send, it was a horrible time, you see. People were desperate. My father would open the store and pass out dimes, for people to buy a loaf of bread. I mean it was a terrible time. And I remember when I went to Mount Vernon, my mother said people asked here where her daughter is, and she'd say "Oh, she's in some little country town, she'll be home in a couple weeks." My mother thought I was coming home any minute.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah. She -n't believe that you would leave town.

Zelkowitz: That's it, and some little country town.

Interviewer: Give us, you were talking about it was a hard time, now I'm sure you were talking about the Great Depression.

Zelkowitz: Right, and it was a, when Charles took me to Mount Vernon, he drove me around the town, and when I, he drove me past Cooper Bessemer (?), and their stock was selling at one. And of course, unfortunately, we didn't even have one. But that Cooper Bessemer is the, was the biggest company in the, and has now, of course, on the stock exchange got a-

Interviewer: At a, what did they do? at was their?

Zelkowitz: They made engines, and, centrifugal engines, and they were involved with the oil pipes up in Alaska, and a tremendous company. But anyhow, I kept books. I was so horrified at the whole thing, butter was selling at twelve cents a pound. If you can imagine things at that time, unbelievable. Well anyhow,-

Interviewer: When you're talking about very meager incomes, that probably was a lot of money, the twelve cents.

Zelkowitz: Oh! Why I should say! Twelve cents!

Interviewer: You mentioned that ten cents would buy a loaf of bread?

Zelkowitz: That's right. Ten cents. Just think of that. When you compare today what is going on, oh my, just unbelievable. Anyhow,

Interviewer: So, did you, you lived in Mount Vernon, you rented for a while, and-Zelkowitz: We rented this apartment, at, and-
interviewer: Where was this located?

Zelkowitz: And, well it was at 512 East Chestnut Street, at 512 and a half. And this, my landlady, Reeda Forbing (?), her husband was a game warden, and she, she, there really wasn't an apartment available. She made her upstairs into an apartment. They didn't even know what an apartment was in that small city. Everybody had a home, you know.

Interviewer: Sure.

Zelkowitz: And so we had her apartment, and we were there, I think I stayed, and my husband was involved with the Masons, and he used, he went through the chairs in the Masons, and became Worshipful Master. And I used to insist that they had a fan-dancer, that what - anybody be doing at a meeting that length of time. And of course I was scared to death to stay at home by myself, I wasn't accustomed to it. And, so anyhow, my landlady was so terrific. She taught me how to can., and how to it, and how to do all the things that people do that live in the country. My family thought I was ingenious when I came in with canned tomatoes and string beans. And

Interviewer: So you were countrified?

Zelkowitz: Yes. I got indoctrinated at an. early time.

Interviewer: Did you eventually buy a home there?

Zelkowitz: So then, at, shortly afterwards, I think it was ... I used to have Sunday school in my home because we had quite a few little Jewish children there, when Chelmar (?) came. And they brought their families, and (-

Interviewer: When what? When what came? I didn't-

Zelkowitz: Chelmar was a big factory, and it came. And when it came it brought with it quite a few Jewish families - The Bersons, the Rabishaws, the Sussmans, and they brought their children. So this is what we at one time, right now in Mount Vernon I'm the only Jewish person, but at that time me must have had twenty-five or thirty, because we also had refugees from Nazi Germany, and from Austria. And so-

Interviewer: That got located in Mount Vernon?

Zelkowitz: They came to Mount Vernon, yes. I wanted to, well but the families that we had in Mount Vernon are really people that live in Columbus now - the Lurie family, -

Interviewer: Lurie - L-u-r-i-e?

Zelkowitz: -i-e. Yes. Lurie family, and there was Morris Rosenthal, and Joe Levenson, and Henry Levy, and Sam Epstein. Course, Sam Epstein had brothers that lived in Lancaster that were in the shoe business. Sam Epstein was in the shoe business for years and years in Mount Vernon.. And then they had the Lander family, Arlene Landers is alive today, and they were, just she and her brother were left, and he passed away, and so Arlene is now in a residential home. She's a very good friend of mine. And I go to see her occasionally, and I'm so glad she recognizes me. But anyhow there was Henry Levy, and then the Dubinsky family. The Dubinsky family were a very big family, and they were in the, I don't know what you call it, I guess is the iron dealers. That's what they said, coal and iron dealers. And then there was Max Meyer, in the scrap dealer, and Phil Abrams. Phil Abrams had the only grocery store where you - go and buy herring and lox. And that came as a, he didn't last long, but he had a wonderful little grocery store. And the Erlangers (?) came from Germany, and they arrived as refugees and, and, the, their, their daughter lives in Mount Vernon now, and, I'm in touch with her too.

Interviewer: So that's another Jewish person that lives there.

Zelkowitz: Yes. But anyhow-

Interviewer: What's the daughter's name?

Zelkowitz: Margo, Margo Erlanger. And she's married to Charlie Waddel. And I, we did an interview for Kenyon College with Margo, and, to, because she remembers a great deal too, about what happened with her family when they came from a-, but they ... Eleanore knew them. They came to Columbus, and the Gerwicks and the Rabishaws we're such good friends too. And Ben Sussman, I think his wife is in Columbus now.

Interviewer: Sounds like a familiar name, but I, I don't-

Zelkowitz: Yes. So that it was a very good Jewish family, and we rented a room and we had, they had services there too. I have one of the books that we used to use. Interviewer: One of the prayer books?

Zelkowitz: One of the prayer books.

Interviewer: So who led the service?

Zelkowitz: And well, ... Erlanger, of course and that English was no small item too, because he was from Germany, and had an accent that was very difficult, but it was his whole family, they were all learned people. And that, and then there was a Gamer. Doctor Richard Gomer, and Mary Gomer. He, when he came to Mount Vernon, he came to Mount Vernon Sanitarium, it was TB fan. And he came there, and he wanted to open a practice, and he -n't

do it until he got to, until he got his degree from Ohio. So he went, I took him to Columbus, he stayed at my husband's mother's, and stayed there all the time to take the medical exam. And if you can imagine how fantastic a person he was, who was from, he was a captain in the German Army, Navy. And he was, when he, he and his wife escaped, and they sent their son to England, and they came to New York. And from New York they read an ad in the paper that they needed a doctor at the sanitarium, and that's how they came to Mount Vernon. And when I found them, why I was so happy to meet with them, and Mary was such a charming person. And she spoke English, but with a Viennese accent. And Mary only used to say, if she - only get rid of her accent, and I said "Mary you need to cultivate your accent because it's so charming, you know." And so I took him out, and we bought furniture for his office, and set him up in an office, and he stayed at my husband's mother's to take the medical exam, and passed it.

Interviewer: That was here in Columbus then.

Zerkowitz: That was here at Ohio State. And if you can imagine what an amazing individual he had to do to be able to pass a medical exam, -

Interviewer: Well that's, -. So, so Helen, it sounds like you had a pretty vibrant Jewish community, even though it was small.

Zerkowitz: We did, we did. We had -

Interviewer: Were, were some of them very observant? What I'm thinking of is in terms of Kosher, you know, per- meats, and so fourth? Where any of them?

Zerkowitz: No, I don't, I don't think we had anybody that held in. I used to, of course, when I first moved there. I had all my meat brought in, and I always told my mother that when I got up to the Pearly Gates, and the Lord wanted to talk about Kosher, I was going to have to ea on the butcher that sent me that dead duck. And, and it was my husband's birthday, and I'd ordered a duck, and it arrived beyond the stage of being used. And I said, that's when I parted, then, with the food situation. So I said I would have to call on the butcher to answer why I had gone out.

Interviewer: Well, it was a challenge to-

Zerkowitz: Yes.

Interviewer: Keep up with it all.

Zerkowitz: Well it was. My sister Ruth came down to visit me, and she knew I loved *shmaltzed* herring, and so she had one all wrapped up, and she was on this bus. And when she got off she forgot the herring, and, and when she got to my house and told me that that herring was on the bus.

Yenkin: It was a very hot day.

Interviewer: And Eleanore has added-

Zerkowitz: And I said I hate to think what those people were going to start looking at each other-

Interviewer: It sounded like-

Zerkowitz: With that loose herring.

Interviewer: It sounded like a very treacherous smell that happened.

Yenkin: Wrapped in a newspaper.

(Unknown): Oh my.

Interviewer: On a warm day.

Zerkowitz: Oh my goodness. Well anyhow, that's what happened.

Interviewer: But you were a close community, and you probably were in contact with each other, and had a lot of-

Zerkowitz: Yes, oh yes. How a Jewish family was. Of course there was Doctor Julius Shamansky, he delivered my son, and his brother Ike was a dentist. So we had a lawyer, and a doctor, and a dentist, and they, and of course, Doc Shemanzky delivered most of the children in Knox County, and everybody loved him.

Interviewer: I'm going to stop at this point and put a different tape in. We are at the side, end of side B, tape 1, and we'll just proceed in a couple of minutes here.

INTERVIEW WITH HELEN ZERKOWITZ (Part II)

(Interviewed by Naomi Schottenstein)

This interview with Helen Weiner Zerkowitz was conducted in the home of her sister, Eleanore Yenkin, at 1620 East Broad Street in Columbus. Mrs. Yenkin participated in some of the responses as Mrs. Zerkowitz spoke of her family, including her brother, Abe Weiner who owned a loan office on Mount Vernon Avenue in Columbus; her nephews, Sam Weiner, Bernard "Bugsy" Kanter and other family members.

Mrs. Zerkowitz also speaks of her marriage to Charles Zerkowitz, of living in Coshocton, Ohio and later in Marion, Ohio where she maintained a regular "morning coffee" talk program on the Radio Station WTNVO which she founded; and of meeting British Princess Margaret Rose, establishing the Hillel Foundation at Kenyon College and being named in 1982 to The Ohio Women's Hall of Fame by then Governor James A. Rhodes.

Schottenstein: Okay, we're on the second tape, side A and Helen is filling us in on the Jewish community of Mt. Vernon, Ohio. A lot of questions are popping into my mind, but before we go any further, I know that you had a son. And was Steven born in Mt. Vernon?

Zerkowitz: Steven was the first Jewish child that came into Mercy Hospital and we had his...

Schottenstein: *Bris*.

Zerkowitz: *Bris* at the Mercy Hospital. And the sisters were beside themselves because they, who showed up Eleanore? Who was that? Oh I remember, Silverman, Reverend Silverman.

Schottenstein: Was he from Columbus?

Zerkowitz: Yes, Sam Silverman's father.

Schottenstein: It - be before my time.

Zerkowitz: Yes, I'm sure.

Schottenstein: Yeah, so he...

Zerkowitz: Anyhow, the *mohel* came up. I don't remember...

Schottenstein: The *mohel* from Columbus?

Zerkowitz: Yes, of course. And my husband's mother had the, the dress and the slip that my husband had on at his...

Schottenstein: *Bris*?

Zerkowitz: *Bris*.

Schottenstein: Uh huh.

Zerkowitz: And so Steven was all dressed up in this, in this dress and this slip and the hat and the little shoes and these sisters at that were so beside themselves because my mother came down and they brought food and everything. And we had this *bris* in the, at Mercy Hospital.

Schottenstein: The hospital.

Zerkowitz: And I don't know why I can't remember that man. - it have been Gellman?

Schottenstein: -n't have been Gellman, - it?

Zerkowitz: Yes, had to be! It was, that was the name I was looking for, Gellman. My goodness, I'm so glad you thought of that.

Schottenstein: Yeah, yeah. He was a very much loved person here at Agudas Achim.

Zerkowitz: Oh that was so sweet of him. Anyhow, that's what we had at Mercy Hospital.

Schottenstein: Oh so you...

Zerkowitz: And my mother came down and my husband met her at the train. And when my mother got off, she had a huge thing, a pot and all kinds of stuff, you know, in this pot. And my husband said to her, "Mrs. Weiner, do you have your passport?" I mean...

Schottenstein: He was teasing her.

Zerkowitz: Yes, of course. And my husband...

Schottenstein: She was carrying a pot, like a pan?

Zerkowitz: Yes. To cook the food, you know.

Schottenstein: Oh my.

Zerkowitz: Because she, mother found my pans, you know, weren't, weren't...

Schottenstein: Kosher.

Zerkowitz: Right.

Schottenstein: Not for her.

Zerkowitz: Right. She brought her food and her pots. And um,

Schottenstein: She came prepared.

Zerkowitz: When Buzzie came, he brought his pot too.

Schottenstein: Is that right?

Zelkowitz: Oh yes, when I can't, when I think that's how Buzzie was when he was young, I love my nieces and nephews. They all came to visit.

Schottenstein: So Steven grew up then, in Mount Vernon, is that?

Zelkowitz: Yes, uh huh. Yes and he came to Columbus for his Bar Mitzvah.

I brought him in every week.

Yenkin: He stayed at my house when he went to the Academy.

Zelkowitz: Yes, he was at Eleanore's. He, Steven, he had developed agranulo- cytosis. His white count disappeared. He was in bed for three months and um, and so when he had to go to summer school to make up for it. So he went in and stayed at Eleanore's and went to summer school at the Columbus Academy. And the headmaster was his tutor in Latin and when he went back to school, the teacher said to him, "Steven, do you have a pony?" and Steven said, "We had three riding horses." And he said, "No, he has a horse." Well of course you know a pony, you know a pony meant a translation.

Schottenstein: Oh, yes...right.

Zelkowitz: That was what they called a "pony". The teacher said to him, "Do you have a pony?" and he said, "No, we have a horse."

Schottenstein: Oh (laughs) she had to get filled in there.

Zelkowitz: She -n't believe that, what happened to him because he had what was his name?

Yenkin: Mr. Dennis?

Zelkowitz: Dennis, Mr. Dennis was the headmaster and there were two children, two students in the Latin class, so he was tutored all summer. So when he got back to school, why the teacher -n't figure out what happened.

Schottenstein: He was well taken care of then, in that department.

Zelkowitz: That's right. So that's when he said, "Mother", he had sat in on several classes and he said, "Mother" he said, "I was in the English class and I didn't even know what they were talking about." And he said, "I don't know" he said, "but I don't think that I'm getting the right education." So that's how he went, and Bernard at that time was leaving for Yale. And Bernard left for Yale and Steven took over his room. And that's why he always loved his cousins. He loved Linda and Sandy, they were very close cousins.

Schottenstein: Yeah, I bet he did love Aunt Eleanore. You took good care of him.

Zelkowitz: That's it and he had his Bar Mitzvah at Eleanore's. He had everything at Eleanore's.

Schottenstein: So did he complete his schooling, then, in Columbus?

Zelkowitz: At the Academy.

Schottenstein: At the Academy?

Zelkowitz: Yes. And then at Ohio State.

Schottenstein: So he got his law degree at...

Zelkowitz: No, he got his degree in broadcasting.

Schottenstein: Oh.

Zelkowitz: Yes. And that's when he came to the company, and at that point, I had... let's see, what year was that? 1954, oh yes.

Schottenstein: When was Steven born?

Zelkowitz: Steve was born May the 5th, 1936. And um...

Schottenstein: Well tell us, fill us in with Steven and then we're going to go back to Mount Vernon in a little bit, 'cause I know you have a lot more to tell us about that.

Zelkowitz: Steven was a very important person for our company. And he started "Food for the Hungry", which we had first five thousand. Today, "Food for the Hungry" has a quota of a hundred thousand. And so he organized the entire county. So that the entire county became involved in Food for the Hungry. And it's an annual event. And uh...

Schottenstein: I assume that means they provided food for people who didn't have it.

Zelkowitz: Oh, for, it was for the church and the Salvation Army. And they have a stock of food for people that don't have food.

Schottenstein: Food bank.

Zelkowitz: You know there's no substitute for food.

Schottenstein: Is that around Thanksgiving time?

Zerkowitz: Well it'll be this December. This December it will be food for the hungry.

Schottenstein: And they still, it's still in operation.

Zerkowitz: Every year...

Schottenstein: Isn't that beautiful.

Zerkowitz: It's perpetual. Yes and so uh...

Schottenstein: So Steven lived in Mount Vernon then, is that...

Zerkowitz: Well he lived in Mount Vernon and then he married Donna Riken. And my sister went to the beauty parlor and saw this girl. And wanted to know, well, you tell her.

Yenkin: Yes I went to this beauty parlor and this very beautiful was getting her hair done. So after she left, I said to the operator, "Who was this girl?" and she said, "Her name is Riken. And she's Jewish." Well, I just -n't believe this lovely looking.. so I came home and told Steven about this very lovely looking girl that I saw at the beauty parlor, so believe it or not, he called her up. And he made a tennis date with her.

Schottenstein: Eleanore is filling us in now.

Yenkin: So Steven called Donna up and made a tennis date with her. And every day, it seemed like, he would come downstairs with a tennis racket. He was staying at my house whenever he was in Columbus. And Steven was like a second son and he would go out with Donna. And that's the way they fell in love and they got married.

Schottenstein: What year was it that they got married?

Zerkowitz: They got married in May the, Steven was born on May the 5th and he got married on May the 3rd, because Steven was twenty-five on May the 5th and I had told him that at twenty-five, he was on his own. That, that was the deadline date.

Schottenstein: Or he got walking papers.

Zerkowitz: So he got married on May the 3rd and uh, that date, I can't remember...

Schottenstein: Did they have a big wedding?

Zerkowitz: Oh yes, they had a big wedding at Agudas Achim.

Schottenstein: Where was Donna from? Was she from Columbus?

Zerkowitz: Yes.

Zerkowitz: Well see, but their family was from Cincinnati. Her father graduated from Ohio State. He was a terrific individual, but he developed spinal, he, solidified spine. And he came to the wedding on a stretcher.

Schottenstein: Oh.

Zerkowitz: And, oh my, and such a terrific person. And her mother was too. She was such a special type of secretary of some kind. But they were, he used to have a grocery store on Nelson Road. And he became ill. And they went to Mayo Clinic and they found he had this solidified spine. And he wasn't able to do anything then, so that's when Margaret went to work. And, uh-

Schottenstein: Did Donna have siblings?

Zerkowitz: No, she's an only child. And Donna, right now, is in Las Vegas. John bought a home there.

Schottenstein: Is that their son?

Zerkowitz: Yes, Jonathan. And she has MS and which is very upsetting, but anyhow, they, Steve and Donna had two children: Jonathan, and Jonathan is now thirty-nine, I can't believe the whole thing, and Julie is thirty-five and she is expecting in January.

Schottenstein: Oh, and will this be your first great-grandchild?

Zerkowitz: This will be my first great-grandchild, so I'm very excited.

Schottenstein: Where does Julie live?

Zerkowitz: Julie lives in Washington, D.C. Julie graduated from uh, from what's the name of that college? Wisconsin. Oh no, huh uh. She, she has her law degree. George Washington University? In Atlanta., Emory. That's it. She graduated from Emory with honors. And she has her law degree and she is working for the Bush campaign. She was and now she is in, she's head of, I have her card, I don't understand it. She's director of

agriculture. I said, "Julie, how can you be director of agriculture?" I at least know something about agriculture, we had a farm. But I said...well, that's it, that's what she's doing.

Schottenstein: It was an appointment and it works.

Zerkowitz: So that's it, yes. So she travels all over. She has been to, up and back from California.

Schottenstein: So she's married?

Zerkowitz: She is married and she is married to Luke McCarthy, which my mother would absolutely, but, but he has turned Jewish. But, you know, that's, what can I say? But he is a terrific, Eleanor met him.

Yenkin: Oh he's a fine person.

Zerkowitz: He's been here.

Yenkin: Is that my telephone?

Zerkowitz: We had such, we had such a nice time with him. He's terrific...he is a triathlete.

Schottenstein: Um, okay, where did, didn't Donna live some place else before...

Zerkowitz: Atlanta, she when she passed away and Steve passed away in '93, March, March the 21st, 1993. That doesn't seem possible, Steve's been gone ten years.

Schottenstein: What was it that he passed away from?

Zerkowitz: He had a heart attack. And so did my husband. My husband had a pace-maker. And...

Schottenstein: Well, I think that pretty much fills us in on that part of the family. Is there any more that you want to offer, you know, in terms of your kid, your grandchildren, and uh, daughter-in-law. Okay. We're going to go back now to Mount Vernon. And you told us about the rental house where you and your husband started your life, and eventually did you buy a house from that, after that experience?

Zerkowitz: Yes we bought an old house and remodeled it. We did every...my sister, Tillie came down and said, "Tear it down." And we remodeled it

Schottenstein: Where was that located?

Zerkowitz: On the corner of Mulberry and Pleasant. And then we were there five years and then the home up the street was owned by Dr. Lord and Dr. Lord was a very close friend of my husband's. He decided he was going to leave and go to the town that he was born in and he wanted to sell his home, so he just had Charles take over the mortgage and that's how we got to where I am today. I lived in this house, I've lived at 5 West Hamtramck. I've lived there for over sixty years.

Schottenstein: What's the address again?

Zerkowitz: Five

Schottenstein: West

Zerkowitz: Hamtramck. Hamtramck was John Hamtramck, he was a famous officer and the government gave him a thousand acres. That's why up in Detroit, I think, they have a Hamtramck Street.

Schottenstein: How do you spell Hamtramck?

Zerkowitz: H-A-M-T-R-A-M-C-K and by the time I get done spelling Hamtramck and then give the name Zerkowitz they think I'm pulling their leg.

Schottenstein: (Laughs) It's a lot of spelling.

Zerkowitz: So anyhow, but that is, and so we moved there when Steven was five years old. And it's a big home. It had fourteen rooms and four baths.

Schottenstein: And you still live there?

Zerkowitz: And I still live there, but I've given my home to the Red Cross and the American Red Cross, they came down to look over the home as to whether they wanted it. Well, of course, I had three furnaces put in so that it's and all my electric and every thing. And so anyhow, they have the downstairs, the Red Cross, and but I have one room, that large room is my office that I maintain on the first floor. And my husband put in an elevator because he had a pacemaker. And we weren't going to be able to stay there and so Charles put this elevator in and I designed it so it goes up and comes right into my kitchen. That's it, so, and it opens both ways so it goes on my back porch and into my kitchen. And when I broke my leg I was able to use that elevator to raise it up and down in order to, 'cause it has a step on the porch. And I have two steps into my bedroom.

Schottenstein: Do you have somebody helping you maintain the house?

Zerkowitz: I have a woman that I've had for many years that comes every Monday. And I have a high school student that comes from three to five three days a week to help me with a lot of my book work. 'Cause I have properties that requires a lot of attention.

Schottenstein: So you still own properties other than your home in Mount Vernon?

Zerkowitz: Yes, uh huh.

Schottenstein: You mentioned something about a farm before.

Zerkowitz: Oh yes, I have two farms and when we, the sorority called me up and said that there was going to be a meeting and they

wanted a representative and they didn't know what the meeting was all about. And they knew that

I loved to go to meetings. My husband claims that I was only happy if

I had a double header. But anyhow, I went to this meeting and these people were talking about bringing a radio station to Mount Vernon. Well, I had just spent two weeks going all through Knox County visiting every farm and I had been in every barn, 'cause we had three riding horses and we had them stabled in our buggy house. We have an old barn that they used to use for buggies, you know, and it had a hay loft for dropping the hay down. And so we had three riding horses. My husband loved to ride and that's how we got into buying horses, and subsequently Steven loved it. He learned to ride and I did too after I got knocked off several times. But anyhow, I went out every morning, I put my dinner in the oven on a timer, and I'd go out and Steven was at Eleanore's so there was nobody home and so I would go out and check on these farms to see who had the best barn. I wasn't looking at the houses, I was looking at the barn. So I had been to this farm and I went to this meeting, and when I got there, they said that they were looking for a farm that was on, it had to have high altitude for FM. Well, this farm, I had talked to this farmer, he was eleven hundred feet above sea level which means it was the highest point in Mount Vernon. It's called "Radio Hill" now. And so when the meeting was over I went up to Dr. Burns, and said, "Listen, I know exactly where you people should be, because I had just been to a farm." So I said I'd like for you to meet my husband. So the next day Charles, we went out to the farm and Mr. Booth was there with his twelve cows and my husband looked at these cows and he looked at me and said, "What do you have in mind?" 'cause Charles had allergies. And so I said, "Well, I think that this is the place they ought to have the radio station." So we got involved with it and subsequently they, the Burns's decided that they wanted to view new horizons, that they didn't want to get involved that deeply. In the meantime, I had sold stock in the company, they had asked me to sell stock and I went out and, cause people knew my husband and knew me so I went out to sell stock. I remember I went to this one woman and.

Schottenstein: Excuse me, is this stock in the radio company?

Zelkowitz: Yes in the broadcasting company.

Schottenstein: In the broadcasting company? Then who owned it at that point?

Zelkowitz: Well it was the the Burns's and we owned it.

Schottenstein: Okay.

Zelkowitz: And when I say we owned it, we just had money put in the pot. There, it wasn't, it wasn't an actuality.

Schottenstein: Uh huh.

Zelkowitz: We didn't even have a franchise. So, but we needed funds in order to move ahead with it. Well the long and short of it was that my husband, Mrs. Burns said she wasn't going to have forty thousand feet of ground wire put into her farm and then mess up her farm. She wanted a flower garden. And so she, she said to my husband, "Why don't you buy our share, then, 'cause we're not going to do it." So she gave Charles a check for a thousand dollars as down payment, because we bought, they bought the farm, you see. I wanted to buy that farm, here we, I wanted it for my horses. But here we were in the midst of something else. And so anyhow, subsequently, my husband bought the farm. And that's how I got my farm I was so thrilled to have my farm, 'cause I had spent so much time looking for it.

Schottenstein: With the barn.

Zelkowitz: I never got my horses there.

Schottenstein: But it was a suitable barn?

Zelkowitz: Yes and the men I wanted to put a WNVO hayloft in it. And then that's when my husband bought some black face Herefords, white face Herefords, 'cause he, oh well anyhow, that's it.

Schottenstein: It sounds like a colorful part of your life.

Zelkowitz: Yes it was and you know my farmhouse, I just finished remodeling it and just did a tremendous amount of work in it. And of course, that's where I had my program for years. I'll never forget this Joe Matthews came in and I was on my program and he comes in right on the table and lays out a map and he says, "Helen, how much corn have you got planted on your farm?" And he didn't realize that Ode and I were on the air. And I said to him, "Joe, I think all the corn is on the air." Well he was absolutely petrified when he heard that he was on the air wanting to know how much corn I had. Because it was a very informal type of program.

Schottenstein: Were you the moderator for a program or were you the sole...

Zelkowitz: I did the program and ran the company. And when I turned it over to my son, we were in the black. And 'cause I was always in favor of being in the black. And I had gone to, I used to go to the Ohio State Broadcasters' meetings and they thought I was from "The Dispatch", because I'd sit there with a, on the front row with a pad and a pencil. They figured I had to be from "The Dispatch". And I went up to WERN, asked them if I - see their books to see how they were keeping it, 'cause I didn't know how to keep broadcasting commercial spot books.

Schottenstein: Helen, let me just interject, did you have any formal training at all?

Zelkowitz: I'll tell you, that's what I said, the only training I had was in front of my range.

Schottenstein: So you really broke into the field with your little bit of *chutzpa*.

Zelkowitz: Well and the inquisitiveness and you know that's what's important. That you and of course, I used to go to all those broadcast meetings and this one man said he was from BMI and I said, "What's that?" Why he said, "That's a music service." He

said, "Where's your station?" he said, "You have to pay BMI for playing their music." I said, "Listen, we don't need it." He said, "Where are you located?" He showed up at my station and we had to end up paying BMI you know we had to pay a copywrite. We were ASCAP, and I thought that was enough. And I said to him, "ASCAP is enough, we don't need B." But that isn't the way you had to do it, so we had to do it.

Schottenstein: You had to go with the rules as they are.

Zerkowitz: That's it, so we had to do it.

Schottenstein: So you just kind of learned as you went along.

Zerkowitz: That's right. I'll never forget this one man said to me, "Mrs. Zerkowitz," he was a, what company was that? Anyhow, he said, they had, "I was a Communist for the FBI" with Dana Andrews. Many years ago, that program was on. And he put that on our station. And I told him that all of us were novices and he said "Mrs. Zerkowitz, don't ever tell that to any body else." (Laughs)

Schottenstein: You had them all fooled.

Zerkowitz: He says, "Don't tell that to anybody else." He says, "People don't like to work with novices." I said, "Well, I thought you should know it."

Schottenstein: How many people were in your company at the top?

Zerkowitz: Well, I think there were about five or six of us. I had a news man, George Bennett, and I had a farm man and we still meet, of course, and he still howls when he thinks of it. He was just a farmer.

Schottenstein: Uh huh. What was his job?

Zerkowitz: He broadcast the farm news.

Schottenstein: Farm, farm news, uh huh.

Zerkowitz: He did the farm news 'cause he was a farmer.

Schottenstein: Sure.

Zerkowitz: And George Batcher was the news man. He had graduated from Baldwin Wallace, which is where Mr. Burns was, you see.

Schottenstein: Uh huh.

Zerkowitz: So and then we had Charlie Kilkenny and then we had a, but we had to have an engineer. And that was the most difficult thing of all. No station can operate legally without a, a registered engineer first class. And I have a friend, Franklin Miller, who's a professor at Kenyon and he came up and he said, "Helen," he said, "I'd like to work at the station this summer, what can I do?" and I said, "Well, Franklin, we need an engineer." And Franklin said, "Well, where do I take the test?" Well our engineer that I had said to me, "Well this will teach him a lesson. He thinks he's going up and taking this test." 'Course, Franklin is a genius. Franklin went up, and he's a very dear friend of mine today. He and I are both ninety-two.

Schottenstein: Uh huh.

Zerkowitz: And he went up to Cleveland and he came back later in the day and he said to Gene Phillips, my engineer, he said, "Well," he said, "it'll take a week for them to send my ticket." That's how he went up and took the first class test, the third class, the second and the first. And he took them right in a row and got his engineering license.

Schottenstein: In how much time?

Zerkowitz: That same day.

Schottenstein: Okay, I just wanted to understand that.

Zerkowitz: I mean he, Franklin is a genius.

Schottenstein: I would think.

Zerkowitz: Yes, he was head of the physics department.

Schottenstein: Is that, your station still in operation? Your station is still in operation?

Zerkowitz: Oh heavens, yes. Right now it's owned by Clear Channel, the biggest owner of radio stations in the world.

Schottenstein: Oh.

Zerkowitz: Clear Channel now owns it.

Schottenstein: Are you actively involved now at all?

Zerkowitz: I'm not involved in any way now. No I'm not.

Schottenstein: You know, a thought just came to my mind. It had to do with way at the beginning of our interview, you were telling us about your siblings, and I think we forgot one of your brothers. Weiner, I'm thinking of Sam's father. Sam Weiner's father.

Zerkowitz: Oh, my brother Abe.

Schottenstein: Yes.

Zerkowitz: Oh my goodness. My brother Abe was the sweetest person in the world. Eleanor had his picture here.

Schottenstein: Yeah, that's, I just happened to think of it. I don't want to leave it.

Zerkowitz: Well, and he has a son and daughter. I think Sam is the current president of the American Bar Association, of Ohio Bar Association.

Schottenstein: I know he's on TV a whole lot. We see him a lot.

Zerkowitz: I think he was just appointed, elected president of the Ohio Bar. And of course he doesn't have children, but my niece...

Schottenstein: He's married, he's married to... Sharon.

Zerkowitz: Sharon has three children. Her, both daughters have taught Hebrew. And she is married to Kiefer and he was administrator of Children's Hospital here in Columbus and his family was in Minneapolis, so they moved to Minneapolis and he was head of Children's Hospital there when they built their large hospital. He is now retired. But they have three children and their two daughters and their son, the girls earned their way through college by teaching Hebrew. So you know how unusual this is and their son is now with the Marriott Inn, with their whole unit on pediatrics, on, what do you, for the elderly?

Schottenstein: Gerontology.

Zerkowitz: Gerontology, that's his field. He loves older people.

Schottenstein: Now who are the children we're talking about? These are their children?

Zerkowitz: This is Sharon, Martha Weiner, my brother Abe's grandchildren.

Schottenstein: Okay, I got. That's what, Abe was married to Martha.

Zerkowitz: Yes he was married to Martha and, and Martha is still living. (Editor's note-Martha died in 2004) She is in Minneapolis with her daughter and Sharon just called me the other day, 'cause her daughter's getting married in May. Their daughter is a medical assistant and she is marrying a doctor who is just finishing his internship and so they're getting married in May. And we're planning on going to the wedding. Just keep that in mind, that's May.

Schottenstein: With wheel chairs.

Zerkowitz: However we can manage.

Schottenstein: However you go.

Zerkowitz: We've got to go.

Schottenstein: Now Sam's married to, tell me who, his wife's name, Sam Weiner's?

Zerkowitz: Frances. Yeah, but I don't remember her last name.

Schottenstein: Uh huh, and they have no children?

Zerkowitz: We went to the wedding, but I don't remember.

Schottenstein: Okay, I just wanted to make sure we had that in the records.

Zerkowitz: I'm glad you did because I certainly wouldn't want to leave my brother Abe out because we loved him dearly. Such a fabulous personality.

Schottenstein: Was he the one who had a musical ability?

Zerkowitz: Yes, he played the piano.

Schottenstein: Uh huh.

Yenkin: He had so many friends. People just took to Abe, he had a marvelous personality. And a very jovial person and a very capable person. And he was in the army Helen, what did he, what did he do in the army?

Zerkowitz: Oh yes. He was a link trainer.

Yenkin: Yes.

Zerkowitz: He trained the flyers.

Yenkin: Night flying.

Schottenstein: Oh my, well that was interesting.

Zerkowitz: Night flying, yes he was a link trainer.

Schottenstein: What did he do for a living?

Zerkowitz: Well he ran my, he took over my dad's store.

Schottenstein: Uh huh, that's what I thought he did.

Zerkowitz: Yes, he had the Weiner Loan office.

Schottenstein: While we're talking about your father's business, can you remember some of the other businesses that were in that area? I think there were a lot of Jewish people.

Zerkowitz: Yes, of course. There was Mr. Levin, uh Lee and Lillian my sister-in-law, Lillian Yenkin.

Zerkowitz: Her father had a tailoring shop. And then there was the Hill Tailoring and then there was the Jewish...Rosenberg, Rosenberg Shoe Store. And that Jewish store right near Pappa. Uh what was his name? I forget. And the, Randy the barber.

Schottenstein: When you say, "Jewish store", did you mean a deli or why was it Jewish?

Zerkowitz: There wasn't a deli, but uh. Doc Ziskind had his office there too. He had his home and his office.

Schottenstein: Uh huh.

Zerkowitz: And Sher, there was a Sher Jewelry and Glick's Furniture. And who else, Helen?

Schottenstein: Now what were the streets that these were on, it was more than just one?

Zerkowitz: On Mount Vernon Avenue.

Schottenstein: Just Mount Vernon?

Zerkowitz: Uh huh. Oh, Marv, the Bonowitzs had a store, the Bonowitzs, that's who

I was thinking of. And then there was the Turkish family, what was that, what were the Turks? Remember, they were handsome fellas.

All I know is that there was a movie there that they used to carry me in. My sister would carry me to get in free. Vernon theatre. The Olympia was the candy store and ice cream store.

Schottenstein: There was a movie theater there too?

Zerkowitz: Oh yes, there were two. There was one at the one end, Cameo, the Cameo and the Vernon Theatre.

Schottenstein: Did you go there to see movies and?

Zerkowitz: To the Vernon. It was a nickel.

Schottenstein: A nickel. And she carried you in so you - get in free?

Zerkowitz: Yes. (Laughs)

Schottenstein: Okay.

Yenkin: I was real little and I was carrying her.

Schottenstein: (Laughs) Okay, now I think we have to go back to Mount Vernon, because it sounds like you had so many attachments there. And I see you have a book that's marked with a lot of important pages. Or there's some highlights.

Zerkowitz: Well, my husband was a, like I say he authored the community trust, which is one of our Foundations. And I used to travel all over with Charles because they were so taken the Foundation book, because it was so small. My husband believed in brevity and that's what this, our Foundation is. And so I used to go with Charles all over to places that wanted to do a study on the simplification of a Foundation. So that's what Charles, and so

Schottenstein: When you mention...

Zerkowitz: My husband was chairman of the Red Cross all during the war.

Schottenstein: World War II?

Zerkowitz: Yes, and so that's how he got so, and I was chairman of the Red Cross, and I was a Gray Lady. So we have always been involved with Red Cross because of its service.

Schottenstein: You mentioned Gray Lady, what is that?

Zerkowitz: Gray lady was like the candy strippers, or whatever name you call for people that help in the hospital, you know.

Schottenstein: Volunteers?

Zerkowitz: Yes, volunteers. So anyhow when, my husband and I discussed when, Steve moved to Columbus, and we discussed about the disposition of our home. And when the time came, and we both decided that it, we should give it to the Red Cross. That

they were operating in the Memorial Building in two clothes closets. The building is big and it had clothes closets on either side and that's where the Red Cross was. So they never had a home. So that's when I decided to give my home to Red Cross. And so they, they have the use of it during my lifetime and upon my demise they get the whole building and it's on a huge lot and has a tremendous barn, so that they plan, they have plans on tearing that down and putting up a building for activities that they need, because they really don't have a place for their services to train. So anyhow, I'm, I'm so happy to have them downstairs so every time I run into a problem I just call downstairs and the director, he, David, he comes up and they do all kinds of things. As a matter of fact, I had a spell and they all showed up and they threw me in the hospital and I didn't want to go. And but they decided that they had 911 come.

Schottenstein: Was this recently?

Zerkowitz: And, oh I guess it was about last year.

Schottenstein: Uh huh, you don't have any intention immediately to leave Mt Vernon, do you?

Zerkowitz: No, I don't, but I was kind of, I told my sister, I was interested in this village, something or...

Schottenstein: Creekside Village?

Zerkowitz: Creekside Village that they're putting up because they really don't have anything here except the Heritage House, which isn't really, it's just a room. And they, like Lutheran Village and these other places, they have, I think the Jews have been very short-sighted.

Schottenstein: Let me just stop just a second to turn this tape over. We're ending side A of tape two and I'm going to turn this off and turn over. Okay, to continue on side B, tape Two. We were talking about Creekside. That's the new community that's being built for retired senior citizens, and they just started that building very recently.

Zerkowitz: Well, it depends on if I get my extension, you know I asked the One Above for an extension all the time. So if I get my extension for next year, why I may be thinking in that direction.

Schottenstein: The One Above, you're talking about the Dear Lord.

Zerkowitz: My home, because I, you know after all, like I say, I've lived in it over sixty years and I've never thrown anything out. And I've always threatened that I wanted to be above ground when I had an auction, because I wanted to defend my purchases. People always say, "I wonder what she was gonna do with that?" Well, I'd like to be there to tell 'em what I was gonna do with it.

Schottenstein: (Laughs) Well, you're gonna have to have one big garage sale.

Zerkowitz: That's what I figure.

Schottenstein: And enjoy the fun of it.

Zerkowitz: That's it, so...

Schottenstein: It's all just stuff, Helen.

Zerkowitz: Oh listen, I mean I don't put, my mother didn't believe in possessions altogether. She was very much...

Yenkin: My sister has beautiful antiques.

Schottenstein: I'm sure she does. Did you and Charles travel very much to...

Zerkowitz: Well, I didn't travel with my husband, but I did a lot of traveling because I went with the International Medical Women to Japan and I had an opportunity, I took my tape recorder because I wanted an interview with Dr. Yamashita. He's the international person on acupuncture, and I wanted an acupuncture treatment from him. So when I got to Japan, they, I registered and they gave me a chain, and they put Dr. Zerkowitz on it, 'cause I was with this group of medical women. So when I got to Dr. Yamashita's clinic, it's called the Pain Clinic. They don't play around with names, they just call it "pain". So I asked one of the doctors, and she gave me a card to give to the cab driver to come and go. So I went to visit Dr. Yamashita and I got there and he, when I met him, he said to me, "Please come with me, I'm on rounds." I ended up on going rounds with the doctor, seeing all these peoples with all this, they had one disease after the other. And here I was on rounds, well, there wasn't a, so finally he got done and we went in and he said, "Let's have a cup of tea." He said, "I haven't had lunch." So I went in and then we sat down, I said, "Dr. Yamashita, there is something we have to straighten up. Number one, I am not a doctor. I'm a broadcaster, and I'm here for two reasons: One, I want to have an interview with you, and two, I want to have a treatment from you." So I had a fascinating interview with him. He had gotten his training in England and had lost a patient in, under surgery. And made up his mind he would never operate on anybody again under ether.

Schottenstein: Oh.

Zerkowitz: So they only operated under acupuncture.

Schottenstein: Wow.

Zerkowitz: If you - imagine.

Schottenstein: Wow, that was interesting.

Zerkowitz: Anyhow, he gave me an acupunc, so I'm going into his office, he tells me to take off my top, and I take off my top, I'm sitting there in my brassiere and this fellow comes in and takes a picture. (Naomi laughs). I thought to myself, "Oh my goodness,

where in the world is that going?" And so I said to Dr. Yamashita, I said, "The pain is in my back." He said, "Don't worry, I'll get to it." Now, I had already had three acupuncture treatments here in the Dodd Hall, in Florida, so I had been through that. He had a tube this long. It looked like a black flashlight, a button at one end and a needle that jumped out at the other. And he went all over my head and my back, all over me, and when he got done, I felt like I was sixteen.

Schottenstein: Wow.

Zerkowitz: I'm completely sold on acupuncture, you know it, 'cause I had a stiff shoulder, up at Dodd Hall was the only thing that ever moved it.

Schottenstein: Well, it certainly worked for you, didn't it?

Zerkowitz: Yes it did, so that was my story with Dr. Yamashita and I came back home and it lasted about six months. But anyhow, when I said to my girlfriend, she was in charge of the tour, and I said to her, "Well, should I have a roommate?" She said, "Don't do it to start with. Wait to see if you find anybody that you want to have." And I was so glad she gave me that advice, 'cause I didn't end up with a roommate all, because these women all drank Scotch and I got so sick. They claim that the reason I got sick was that I, all I ever drank was a virgin mary. (Naomi laughs) And they were all drinkin' Scotch, and so that they were killin' the germs and I didn't realize...

Schottenstein: It was medicinal for them.

Zerkowitz: That's it.

Schottenstein: Uh huh.

Zerkowitz: But anyhow, that's when I when to Japan. Then I went to Athens, Greece with the Kidney Foundation here in Columbus. We, I had started the Kidney Foundation in Mount Vernon. And because we had quite a few people on dialysis. And so when they were going to go to Athens, why she asked if I wanted to do it. Why of course, I did. My husband insisted, you know, my husband wanted me to do everything.

Schottenstein: Now he wasn't traveling with you on these...

Zerkowitz: No, no, uh uh, no, my husband was a workaholic. He and his law partner, they put themselves under early. Both of 'em worked seven days a week. So they were only happy when I was busy doing something.

Schottenstein: Kind of got you out of the way.

Zerkowitz: That's it. So that's how I got to Athens, Greece with all these people that went had had, were on dialysis and had kidney transplants and we went to, it was so interesting. One of the Greek families in Mount Vernon found out that I was going to Athens, and she wanted to know if I would take a baby gift, so I ended up with a baby gift to take and I was so glad. I took it to this family 'cause they had me to dinner and his father, who only spoke Greek and said to his son, "Ask her why their country elected an actor for president." This was Reagan.

Schottenstein: Reagan. (laughs)

Zerkowitz: He said, "Ask her why?" and I said, "Listen, you tell your father that we've had a rail splitter, we started out with somebody that split wood." So I said that that actor was top stuff compared to the log splitter.

Schottenstein: Right, right.

Zerkowitz: So anyhow, but I had a fascinating time in Athens at the Arena. That's where we held all of our races. And the people that were in those races were all people that had had kidney failure or something wrong with their kidneys.

Schottenstein: But they were able to participate.

Zerkowitz: Yes, uh huh.

Zerkowitz: Uh huh. It was just amazing. So Verda Sharp was the name of the director here and I've been wanting to, I wrote her name down because I, thought of been trying to remember those names. It's very difficult.

Schottenstein: I know you mentioned the one trip to Israel that you and Eleanore took.

Zerkowitz: Oh my goodness, my sister Eleanore was head of the Women's Division here in 1970, and I told her I'd like to go and she asked, what was his name? He was the head of the Division. He passed away.

Schottenstein: Ben Mandelkorn.

Zerkowitz: Ben Mandelkorn. I said to Eleanore if I can go as a broadcaster, and they had room so I went with my tape recorder. We had the most marvelous time there. And when we saw Israel when they had corrugated huts. There was no Tel Aviv noR all these beautiful buildings you see. I hope somebody's got pictures of those corrugated huts. That the way people lived at that time.

Schottenstein: But you had your tape recorder. Did you get...

Zerkowitz: Yes, and I interviewed all of the people on the, running the country, I'm trying to think. And when we were on the bus, do you remember the head of the Interior was out digging in the street? With his sleeves rolled up? I forget.

Schottenstein: This is in 1970?

Zelkowitz: Yes.

Schottenstein: Uh huh, was that your first trip to Israel?

Zelkowitz: Yes, that was my first. I've had three or four since, so has my sister, but-

Schottenstein: When you went back to Israel the other times, did you just go as a tourist or did you go...

Zelkowitz: No, we went on, we went with the Rabbi and then my sister Eleanore and my sister Ruth and I went ourselves for a month.

Schottenstein: Oh.

Zelkowitz: We had the most fabulous time, the three of us. I got down to Eilat. And um, I went swimming in the Red Sea. Who was with us, Leonard? Yes, yeah, Leonard Schottenstein.

Zelkowitz: Leonard came up to me and said, I jumped off the boat and swam in the Red Sea and 'cause I love to swim and I knew I wasn't comin' all that way and not getting into the Red Sea.

Yenkin: She was so lucky that where she jumped off it was deep, 'cause otherwise, there was four feet of water.

Schottenstein: She'd be in trouble.

Zelkowitz: Yes.

Schottenstein: Um, so okay, you've been to, you've explained a few of the trips that you've taken, so it sounded like you got around a bit.

Zelkowitz: Well I went to England. I was president of the, the Women's, American Women Broadcasters and I was head of their Educational Division. The Foundation, the Educational Foundation. And I went as a representative to England and I met Queen Margaret and she said to me, she said, "How does a woman get to be owner of a radio station in America?" and I said to her, "Well," I said, "It just takes a series of events turning the right way."

Schottenstein: And they did. Is this Princess Margaret or...

Zelkowitz: Princess Margaret, yes, they were all lined up and we and we were passing through and I remember that, so I was in England for that.

Schottenstein: I'm going to go back again, to a facet of your life that I don't think we've covered. I wanted to know about your education. Where did you go to school?

Zelkowitz: Well, I graduated from Mount, East High School.

Schottenstein: Where did you go for elementary?

Zelkowitz: I think we went to Pilgrim.

Yenkin: Well that was junior high. We went to Garfield Avenue School.

Zelkowitz: Oh was it Garfield?

Yenkin: For the first three grades, I think, and then we transferred over to Pilgrim to the junior high.

Schottenstein: Is that still existing, Pilgrim?

Zelkowitz: Pilgrim is still there.

Schottenstein: Is it? Where is this located? Do you...

Yenkin: It's, it's on Taylor Avenue, way down by the...

Schottenstein: Uh huh, it's on Taylor Avenue. Okay, and you graduated from?

Zelkowitz: From East High School. And I had very dear friends there. Lill Callif was there and Mildred Finer. I wonder what ever happened, I don't know. Anyhow, my husband used to pick me up in a blue Auburn and the girls were beside themselves. Charles was a, a student at Ohio State and he worked double shift at a gas station so that he bought himself a blue Auburn. And he used to come and pick me up after school. Well, I tell you that was...

Schottenstein: Pretty impressive, wasn't it?

Zelkowitz: Yes, I mean they just -n't get over that. Anyhow, then I went to Ohio State, and then my dad bought a car, we had a little two-seated Ford, wasn't it?

Yenkin: Dad bought it for me. It had red wooden wheels and we used to, that's when we went to Ohio State. The spokes were wood.

Schottenstein: Wow, that was a pretty sharp car, wasn't it?

Zelkowitz: Oh... and Eleanore, Eleanore got a job. How did that happ..what went on with that?

Yenkin: You mean at the insurance company? Oh, at AbeYenkin's, at the paint company? Oh, (laughs) uh, Bess Yenkin was my sorority sister and she said her brother was coming home from New York and he was going to be needing a secretary. I said, "Well, I'm a secrete, I've had twelve years of shorthand and typing." And I really wanted the job. So I was so bashful. Helen called up and applied for the job.

Schottenstein: Oh, you pushed things along.

Zelkowitz: That's it, I called up and applied for the job and gave him a fast conversation and then she showed up.

Schottenstein: Oh that was, that was cool.

Yenkin: He said that when I walked in the door he didn't care what kind of shorthand I took (all laugh) he knew I was gonna be...

Schottenstein: You passed the test, Eleanore, well I've seen your pictures of that time of your life. Well, I think you all were attractive.

Zelkowitz: Did you see the picture in here?

Schottenstein: No, I didn't see that. We're going to look at it after this, this interview.

Zelkowitz: So anyhow, well that was that story. So then my sister got married. And my father had a stroke. And I was in my second year at Ohio State. And I quit 'cause my father had a stroke and it hit his right arm. And so I, my, everybody was gone. I was the only one left at home.

Schottenstein: Uh huh.

Zelkowitz: And um, so Dad had an Oldsmobile and I drove him and my mother and that was it, and I took care of my father, Dad was quite ill. And so that's what happened.

Schottenstein: So you didn't finish...

Zelkowitz: So I never got back to school.

Schottenstein: It didn't sound like you really needed to. I think you probably were able to manage okay.

Zelkowitz: Well, I just -n't, I -n't do it and 'cause I -n't leave my father. And then I got so ill, I got pernicious anemia, because I never ate and I was always, I took care of Dad, I did all of Dad's cooking and things 'cause mother just, you know my mother was taking care of the Lord and

Schottenstein: (Laughs) I remembered some story, and maybe this would be a time to put this in, I remember somebody, probably Miriam, my sister-in-law, Miriam, telling us about you girls going to spend a day with your mother. You used to, maybe weekly...

Zelkowitz: Oh yes, my mother took Thursday off. My mother tried to get poor Mrs. Yenkin to leave her family on a Thursday to go to a movie and have dinner out. Oh, my goodness.

Schottenstein: Your mother loved movies?

Zelkowitz: Yes.

Schottenstein: That's what I heard.

Zelkowitz: Mama - walk from movie to another. She tried to get poor Mrs. Yenkin to leave her family flat and to go out and enjoy herself for one day a week, Thursday, nobody, there was, my mother did no cooking on Thursday. She was gone all day. And she would go downtown and buy peanuts and feed all the pigeons at the courthouse.

Yenkin: The squirrels.

Zelkowitz: The squirrels.

Schottenstein: Well, did you accompany her? Did you sisters accompany her or she went on her own? She did her own thing?

Zelkowitz: Yes, uh huh, but we would go out. I'll never forget the day mother went into Lazarus and had that tuna fish. And she said out loud, "This is the nastiest sandwich I've ever had." And this woman, the hostess, came racing over (laughs).

Schottenstein: Well she said it like it was probably...

Yenkin: Yes, our mother always, that's one thing Mother did. She carried a hot cup of coffee all through Lazarus to the woman that was selling pencils out in front of Lazarus.

Schottenstein: Oh she wanted to take care of her. She was certainly a thoughtful person.

Zelkowitz: Yes. Oh my goodness.

Schottenstein: I think she taught you all well. She did.

Yenkin: And another thing, another thing, mother chased a man that, that the blind man that was walking on High Street with a dog. Well mother gave him a dollar and she said, "This is for your dog."

Schottenstein: Oh (laughs).

Yenkin: "Buy your dog something."

Schottenstein: Oh boy, that's what she wanted. Did you all help her in some way, even after you were married, were you able to...

Zelkowitz: Oh my goodness, I came in every Friday. My mother used to open up the door and say, "The Lord's sent you." I had arrived just in time to clean the kitchen, and to do the finishing touches.

Schottenstein: Get ready for Shabbat.

Zelkowitz: Yes. And of course, I took care of Passover. My mother's dishes were on the top floor. And I used to come in for Passover and wash her shelves and get her shelves ready. And bring these dishes down. And get these pots.

Schottenstein: I'd say you were an angel too.

Yenkin: She's forgetting that I was with her.

Schottenstein: Oh, don't, let's not forget that Eleanore...

Zelkowitz: Eleanore was married at the time, though.

Yenkin: Yes, but I always was with you.

Zelkowitz: But I took...

Schottenstein: And you pitched in, I bet. Okay,

Zelkowitz: I took all her...

Schottenstein: We gotta give you credits.

Yenkin: 'Cause I loved Helen, I loved to be with her.

Schottenstein: Oh, that's great.

Zelkowitz: My sister taught me to drive, you know. She turned her car over to me on Broad Street. Just like that, without... And she said, "Come on, take the wheel." And she hands me the wheel and we're going on Broad Street in her car.

Schottenstein: Oh, she had confidence in you, that's what it, what it amounted to, didn't you? You had confidence in her.

Yenkin: Oh, yes.

Schottenstein: And you did okay with it.

Zelkowitz: Yes, apparently so, but she don't have that much confidence now.

Schottenstein: What about, what about social life in Jewish community. Did you and Charles come to Columbus to participate in social activities?

Zelkowitz: Yes, well we were always interested in... I, I've always been interested in contributions. I mean, this to me, you know my mother imbedded all that in us.

Schottenstein: Were you involved at all in the university, Gambier? Did you participate...

Zelkowitz: Well, out at Kenyon...

Schottenstein: Kenyon.

Zelkowitz: I established the Hillel Fund. And I went to Kenyon and realized that they did not have any sufficient funds to maintain a Hillel. And so I established a fund there that since two other people have added to it. But they, we have a hundred and forty Jewish students.

Schottenstein: Oh.

Zelkowitz: At Kenyon, and so through the Foundation, I have established a fund for Hillel which is very important for, for the young people.

Schottenstein: I think I'm going to start winding down. I know that you, I probably - go on another hour easily, Helen.

Zelkowitz: Well but I do want to tell you about my recent Hall of Fame. I was at the, spoke at the, what is it? Our 2003, on October 7th, we had the governor and his wife and I had the closing remarks at this meeting and I, in 1982, from Governor Rhodes, I had received the Hall of Fame, Ohio Women's Hall of Fame, which I...

Schottenstein: That's an award, an annual award?

Zelkowitz: Yes, it's an award and I was very happy to receive that and I was telling my sister, on my closing remarks I mentioned that I was having a birthday a month from that day. It was October 7th when the meeting was, in the atrium at the Capitol. And I mentioned that I was going to be ninety-two, and the next thing I knew, I got a birthday card from the governor which I really appreciated. And, because when I introduced him, I introduced his wife as his secret weapon.

Schottenstein: Oh. (Laughs)

Zelkowitz: And the power behind the throne.

Schottenstein: Uh huh.

Zelkowitz: And I know she was pleased with that. I have several pictures.

Schottenstein: That's pretty descriptive.

Zelkowitz: That's it, so anyhow, it's been a wonderful life and I'm grateful that the Lord has blessed me that I have been able to keep my mind. That's the most important thing.

Schottenstein: It is.

Zelkowitz: And it's a blessing and I certainly am grateful for it.

Schottenstein: Well, we're all blessed with your life being as colorful as it has been and to share all of this with us and I know my associate here, Flo Gurwin, and I, both have enjoyed the afternoon with Eleanor Yenkin and Helen Zelkowitz. And we're on the top floor looking out at a very misty, gloomy day but it's very joyful right in here. And this is November 18, 2003.

Zelkowitz: That's my husband's birthday.

Schottenstein: Oh is that right?

Zelkowitz: Yes. It is, and I just want to close by saying that my mother always said that you can't afford to look like you feel.

Schottenstein: Oh that's a good thought. That's great and now I feel like I should be combing my hair. It's been blowing all day today. Thank you so much, from the Columbus Jewish Historical Society, for the time that you have given us this afternoon. And we're going to end at this. Actually we are resuming, or continuing our interview with Helen Zelkowitz and it's now November 20th and she had some more thoughts that she wanted to share so I'm back here and we're going to talk a little more. I think Helen mainly wants to focus on her husband Charles' life at this point.

Zelkowitz: Yes on his family altogether, because Charles was my first cousin once removed. But his mother, as we called Aunt Sarah, was the daughter of Meyer, of Meyer Weiner, who was my father's brother. And it was Meyer Weiner who had four girls and, and four boys. And, and I called, we always called her Aunt Sarah, and there was Aunt Mary, Aunt Ethel, and Aunt Till, her sisters. And they had four sons and it was Uncle John, he was in Washington, D.C. with a congressman for years, as his assistant. And Dave Weiner, who was an attorney for many years in Washington, Pennsylvania.

Yenkin: And a judge.

Zelkowitz: And also a judge, yes. I think he was a friend of Petakowski's. Eleanore,

I don't know what relation that would be.

Schottenstein: Well it would be Eleanore's grandson's father, Johnny Petachowski's father, who was a rabbi in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Zelkowitz: Yes and he was being interviewed as a rabbi for Washington, Pennsylvania when he passed away, Eleanore said.

Schottenstein: Petakowski, uh huh.

Zelkowitz: So the Weiner Family was a very large family. We used to have the Weiner cousin club and there would be some fifty of us and we would be at the Granville Inn for many years. We met there when the children were small and growing up, so that it gave the young people an opportunity to know their cousins. And...

Yenkin: It was, the Weiner's cousin club was formed at our, at my home on Drexel Avenue, with David Weiner presiding.

Zelkowitz: So, but we used to meet at large at, particularly the Granville Inn, because it was such a nice place for everyone to stay.

Yenkin: Did you say the Granville Inn?

Zelkowitz: Uh huh. In Granville, Ohio. And so, but the Weiner Family was a very large family, but the years have taken a toll because Eleanore and I, I think, are the last two of the Weiner family. And of course, we're expecting our extensions, so we're hoping for the best.

Schottenstein: Well, I am too.

Zelkowitz: But my husband's family, Charles' dad, when they, he was born and raised in East Orange, New Jersey. And Charles' mother kept kosher all that time. And it was a difficult task to do too.

Schottenstein: Why was it difficult?

Zelkowitz: In the small, well East Orange, New Jersey was such a small place that the meat had to be shipped in and I know all about shipped-in meat, 'cause I went through that stage myself. But anyhow,

Schottenstein: Why did they settle, what made them come to East Orange, New Jersey?

Zelkowitz: And so, well, Charles got a scholarship to Cornell and he graduated then, from Cornell. And that was when we drove up

to Cornell after him, was the first time that I had met, but they moved to Coshocton, Ohio, first. And Charles' dad had a shoe store for many years there, in Coshocton. And I know Flossie and Violet and I have driven to Coshocton many years ago to see their home, 'cause it was a very big home. 'Cause Aunt Sarah had a large family. There was Charles and Harold and brother Billy, and then there were four girls.

Yenkin: Miriam.

Zerkowitz: Miriam and Flossie and...Edith and Violet. And each of these girls, Edith particularly, when she was married to Lou Sherer, adopted four children from the Hannah Neil Mission. Yes, four children and she raised four children and they loved her dearly. And Lou Sherer has passed away since then, but the boys, one lives in Arizona. I visited out there. Charles' mother had me go out, 'cause Edith passed away there.

Schottenstein: So this was part of your husband's family then?

Zerkowitz: Yes, uh huh.

Schottenstein: Yeah, I remember these people that you're talking about and I didn't realize the connection.

Zerkowitz: Yes, well that was it. So Edith's children, we still keep in touch. Particularly with the one daughter, she was here not too long ago. And I'm so sorry, I can't remember her name.

Zerkowitz: They were in Coshocton for quite a few years and then they moved to Columbus because both Charles and Harold were going to go to Ohio State. And it just made good sense for them to come.

Schottenstein: What was life for them like in Coshocton?

Zerkowitz: Well, it was a small community and very few Jewish people. But I remember they had a big house and the boys loved to play tennis.

Schottenstein: But what brought them to Coshocton?

Zerkowitz: I really don't know why they came to Coshocton. Somebody had a shoe store.

Yenkin: For sale.

Zerkowitz: Something happened. Anyhow, Charles' dad really knew nothing about that because he was a master furrier and tailor and as a matter of fact, he made Bernard's, Bernard's raccoon coat out of Eleanore's old (laughs) raccoon coat when Bernie was about five years old.

Zerkowitz: Yes, Eleanore he had a raccoon coat and

Schottenstein: I bet you have a picture of him in that, somewhere.

Zerkowitz: Yes, I'm sure. So Charles' dad made that. So anyhow, they lived up north on Fifteenth Avenue and Gram used to have boys stay at her home. Sid Zimmerman.

Yenkin: Students.

Schottenstein: Ohio State students?

Zerkowitz: Yes. Some very fine boys and they're the ones that used to show up at our house on Friday night when we -n't get out. All the boys that stayed at Aunt Sarah's showed up at our house, 'course they all came to see Eleanore.

Yenkin: Oh no, but they came to dance.

Zerkowitz: Yes, they did.

Schottenstein: But did your mother allow dancing on...

Zerkowitz: Oh my goodness, yes, we were allowed. The music.

Yenkin: Music and dancing.

Schottenstein: That was okay for Shabbat?

Zerkowitz: Oh yes.

Schottenstein: Well, she knew where you were, that's for sure.

Zerkowitz: Well and all the activities. All the activities took place on Friday night at Ohio State. And we missed all of them because we were not allowed out.

Schottenstein: But it sounded like you didn't miss a whole lot of fun.

Zerkowitz: Well, no we didn't. We had a great time at home and we taught so many boys to dance. Harold Schottenstein and Earl Rosenbloom and who was that that played the piano? He was...

Yenkin: Stanley Jay.

Zerkowitz: Stanley Jay and there was another person too that played the piano. I remember, but all those boys, they all entered into, had a great time every Friday night.

Schottenstein: Well, it gave a lot of happy memories to people, that's for sure.

Zerkowitz: Yes, I should say so.

Schottenstein: And Harold, I know that Harold Schottenstein was an outstanding dancer when he was on the dance floor.

Zerkowitz: Oh yes, well that's where it all started.

Schottenstein: Oh, that's interesting.

Zerkowitz: So yes, so then Charles and his brother both graduated from Ohio State. Charles graduated in law and so did Harold. For a short time, Harold was in practice with Smattie Ziskind and then he went to State College and became a professor of speech. He has written several books, and one of them he wrote with his daughter, Margie.

Schottenstein: Are any of Charles' family,

Zerkowitz: Harold has passed.

Schottenstein: They're all gone?

Zerkowitz: They're all gone. It doesn't seem possible, but Violet was the last one and she passed away not too long ago.

Schottenstein: What was Violet's last name?

Zerkowitz: Well she had quite a few of them. She started out, she married Choppie Feinstein. And Choppie passed away and then she married, I can't think of his name.

Zerkowitz: Well you did yesterday (laughs). Meyer? Was it Meyer? Yes.

Schottenstein: I can't think of his last name either, I know who you mean.

Zerkowitz: Yes. And then she was married to Lou Goldfarb.

Schottenstein: Oh right.

Zerkowitz: When he passed away.

Schottenstein: Well Lou is still living.

Zerkowitz: Yes, Lou is, but Meyer passed away. So and then Flossie was married to Lou Wilson and she had three daughters. And Flossie had three very lovely daughters. She had Shirley who is Shirley Levitin.

Schottenstein: 'Scuse me, Meyer's last name was Schecter.

Zerkowitz: Yes, that's, yes, Meyer Schecter. So, Flossie had three daughters, and she had Barbara Wilson, who is the oldest and then Shirley and then Toby. And Toby is married to Les Crystal who is the executive director of PBS, and let's see, Shirley, of course, is married to Doctor Levitin. Shirley was married to Bob Schiff. And had three sons. And a daughter.

Schottenstein: And her other daughter, Barbara?

Zerkowitz: And her other daughter was Barbara Scott and Barbara was married too and she had a couple of sons. Isn't that awful, I can't remember those boys' names. Anyhow.

Schottenstein: Barbara lives out of town too, doesn't she?

Zerkowitz: She's in Florida.

Schottenstein: Florida, uh huh.

Zerkowitz: She lives there permanently. And, but of course, Shirley lives here, except in the winter. And um, and Toby lives in Washington D.C. at Watergate, 'cause as I say, her husband is in charge of that news program. So as a matter of fact, those are the flowers she sent.

Schottenstein: Oh, oh I see. There's some lovely flowers here on the table.

Zerkowitz: Yes.

Schottenstein: That's for your birthday a couple of days ago.

Zerkowitz: Yes. It doesn't seem possible. Well anyhow,

Schottenstein: You want to tell, fill us in on Charles' career, 'cause I know...

Zerkowitz: So then Charles when he graduated, it was right in the midst of the depression. In twenty-nine, and so he -n't find any employment here in Columbus. So he of course had been raised in the small town so one of the doctors who was always coming in to Charles' father's store insisting that he come to Mt. Vernon, because Judge Howk had died and he thought that would be a good

place for him to come. So Charles went to Mt. Vernon and of course, Judge Hawk, not only had Judge Hawk died, but his practice had died before him. And he hadn't practiced in many years. So my husband ended up taking a quarter the first year, and he was subsidized, we both were, by my parents. And his parents, because finances were very bad at that time. And like, I think I mentioned we were paying eighteen dollars a month rent, which was unbelievable, but ...

Schottenstein: Did it finally connect in, the practice?

Zerkowitz: Well yes, then finally, 'course Charles, with the name of Zerkowitz in the community where only Smith and Brown existed, they thought the Russians had landed. And they were, it took a long time for people to realize that he was a lawyer of integrity and he certainly had, the community certainly felt that way.

Schottenstein: Were you the only Jewish people there at that time?

Zerkowitz: No, when we came there, Doc Shamansky, Julius Shamansky was a doctor there and Ike Shamansky and Ethel was going with Ike at the time. So Ethel and I would go down to visit.

Schottenstein: What was Ethel's maiden name?

Zerkowitz: Feinstein.

Schottenstein: Feinstein, uh huh, okay.

Zerkowitz: Yes, I thought so. Ethel was a very beautiful person. She passed away not too long ago. And I got a letter from her daughter. Her daughter's a nurse. And I don't know where her son is. But...

Schottenstein: Now you weren't working at this point with Charles just getting started there?

Zerkowitz: I not only wasn't working I had pernicious anemia and I was in bed for six weeks and my mother sent a nurse down to take care of me. And it took quite a while for me to get back my health. I didn't do any work until Steven went to Columbus academy. And it all took place at the same time so that I had a lot of time and I was going to open up an office for marital relations and my husband said to me, "Just keep in mind, that if you get into trouble, you'll have to get yourself a Philadelphia lawyer. Don't expect me to represent you." Because I knew the answer to, I thought

Schottenstein: What made you think that you were qualified?

Zerkowitz: I that you see, I just happen to be the type of individual that doesn't recognize her limitations.

Schottenstein: Good for you, okay. But you ...

Zerkowitz: So I was going to open that office, so my husband was very happy when I, because I stayed in his office three days and I only lasted three days 'cause a client came in and she had three little girls and her husband was beating her and my husband was buying milk for these three little girls. And I,

Charles wasn't in the day she came in and I said to her, I said, "Have you ever thought of picking up a knife and putting it in a soft spot and turning it till you heard a very funny sound?"

Schottenstein: (Laughs)

Zerkowitz: And she said, "I've thought of it, but I didn't know what would happen if I missed."

Schottenstein: I'm not sure that was the best advice.

Zerkowitz: Oh my husband tossed me out of the office,

Schottenstein: You lost it.

Zerkowitz: That was my career was at an end.

Schottenstein: Helen, I'm going to stop. Don't forget your train of thought because I don't want to miss out on this, but we're going, This is side B of tape Two. I'm going to another tape now. Okay we're on side A of tape Three. Helen, continue with your story.

Zerkowitz: Well, the main thing was that my husband didn't approve of divorce, and he subsequently wouldn't even let anybody cross the threshold after his occasion with these two. This one he had a case in court he was in the bathroom shaving, I answered a phone and this woman said, "Tell the Mister not to come to court today." She -n't pronounce his last name, and I said, "Why do you say that?" she said, "Well, my husband said he wasn't going to beat me anymore, and he would sign a paper." So I said to her, "How many sheets of paper is he going to sign?" She said well, she didn't know. I said, "Well how many rooms do you have in your home?" I said, "You wouldn't want to be caught in any one of those rooms without that paper." And my husband's listening to this conversation, "Who are you talking to?" so I said to her, "Listen, I think you should know that the YMCA is opening a judo class, and I think by all means you should go down and take a lesson, because," I said, "you certainly wouldn't want to be caught without any protection." My husband was so aggravated. When he, he said, "That ends it," no woman is ever going to cross his threshold. He wouldn't even let them in the office. He sent them to the minister. That was the answer.

Schottenstein: Well, that was good advice, I think.

Zerkowitz: Straight to the minister.

Schottenstein: So that was the end of another career of yours.

Zerkowitz: So he would never do that and that's why he went in and his practice was all on the business end.

Schottenstein: The other becomes too emotional.

Zerkowitz: Well, uh, the women were so, women are so fickle you know, when it comes to what they're gonna do about a divorce.

Schottenstein: Uh huh, and this was kind of a, maybe a little bit of a backward community where maybe they didn't take as much liberty.

Zerkowitz: Well and then, and then my husband was so concerned because we had one lawyer that told his client that his wife should be shot. And he went down on the square and shot his wife. And said his lawyer told him to do it. (laughs)

Schottenstein: Oh, you mean, they really did.

Zerkowitz: It actually happened so that's why my husband was so concerned about the advice I had given out to this.

Schottenstein: Oh my.

Zerkowitz: But, uh...

Schottenstein: Was that free advice?

Zerkowitz: Oh yes, that's but when my husband always used to go to the post office every morning and somebody always met him out at the post office and he would invite them to come and stand on the curb, because he wanted (laughs) to feel that it was "curbstone advice".

Schottenstein: "Curbstone advice", so that's where that comes from, huh?

Zerkowitz: Yes. That's it.

Schottenstein: Okay, so how long was it, now he continued the rest of his life.

Zerkowitz: My husband went through the chairs of the Masonic seven years and I insisted that they had a fan dancer down there. I -n't understand what he was doing at the Masonic Temple for so many hours. But anyhow, I became a member of the Eastern Star and quickly found out what he had been doing.

Schottenstein: What were they doing?

Zerkowitz: Well, they have a ritual that they go through that takes the whole time. And so Charles' picture is hanging up there, and of course...

Schottenstein: So he was very much a part of the community at that...

Zerkowitz: And then of course, well he was past president of the Chamber of Commerce and his picture is in the office of Zerkowitz, Barry, and Colors, that he established. And...

Schottenstein: What happened to that law firm?

Zerkowitz: It's still, it's the top law firm in Colum, in Mt. Vernon.

Schottenstein: It's still with that name?

Zerkowitz: Oh yes.

Schottenstein: Uh huh.

Zerkowitz: That's because it has a AAA rating in Martindale Hubble. That's why they maintain the name. That's why all lawyer firms maintain their names, because they can't afford to change it.

Schottenstein: Well that was a tribute too, to establish that kind of reputable law firm.

Zerkowitz: That's right. So that.

Schottenstein: Did you spend most of your social hours, well you have a lot of family, so a lot of your social life circled around your family, didn't it?

Zerkowitz: It did but I had so many friends in Mt. Vernon. I established a sor. I had a woman came from Columbus and wanted me, came out to the radio station, said, "Oh" she said, "I want you to start a Soroptimist club." Soroptimist is executive women and it's international. And I said, "Well, I can't do that, I've got all I can do." "Oh, yes, you can," she said, "That's what we need is a busy person." So that's how I became charter president of Soroptimist. And it was started in 1952. And so.

Schottenstein: Was Charles ever involved on the air with your radio program?

Zerkowitz: No. No.

Schottenstein: How' bout the business part of it?

Zerkowitz: Well, that was a very important part. My husband, if it hadn't been for my husband we -'ve never operated the radio station, because he, he...

Schottenstein: He kept you on the level, huh?

Zelkowitz: Yes, he took care of all of it and of course and I went to different meetings so that I was able to become informed on the areas that I wanted to, particularly the bookkeeping, which was so completely different. And when I go out to the station today and see the equipment, and we put in the towers. We started out as an FM in 1951.

Schottenstein: FM?

Zelkowitz: We - not get an AM license. Ashland got our AM license. AM's were very hard to get. We had an FM license, and of course the only people that had FM was my mother, and my sister. In 1951, very few people had FM.

Schottenstein: But AM was available?

Zelkowitz: We - not get an AM. It wasn't until 1953, that through a contact that I had, I found an engineer that developed 1300 and he was able to get us a frequency and it became, I called it "Lucky 13". And that's why I always felt thirteen was very lucky. I was married on the thirteenth.

Schottenstein: Oh well, it was a good number for you.

Zelkowitz: That's it. So we got our AM in 1953 and had our FM in 1951 and all we did was lose money and we had a big robbery at the station. Johnny Jones, who was a Columbus Dispatch columnist many years ago, came to Mount Vernon and he was giving a talk. He had just gotten back from a trip to Europe. And I invited him out to the station to do a tape with him and this was after his program in the evening. So he came out to the radio station and we did an interview on tape and as he was ready to leave, he stood on the porch of this farmhouse and he said to me, "This certainly is an ideal place for a robbery." And I said, "What do you mean?" Well, he said, "There's been two or three radio stations robbed recently." And I said, "My goodness, why would they rob a radio?" I said, "We've got a safe." I had a big safe that I had bought for very little from, they had closed the old library. And I had a sign on it, "This safe is unlocked, it only has cookies", so that I knew that I didn't want anybody breaking into it. So when he said that there had been robberies I went home that night and I said to my husband, I said, "Do we have insurance on our transmitter?" and Charles said, "No we don't." I said, "Well I think we should." I said, "Johnny Jones claims that they're going around the country stealing transmitters." Three days later I get a telephone call at six in the morning and it's Harvey Fox, our engineer at the station. He says, "Helen, don't bother coming out." he said, "There's no equipment. The exciter's gone in the transmitter, the control board is gone, and, and the tables, everything is gone." Can you imagine?

Yenkin: But, had you already taken out the insurance?

Zelkowitz: So anyhow, he's got me on the phone, and I turned and I said to my husband, "Do we have insurance (laughs) on our transmitter?" Charles said, "Yes, I put a rider on it the very day."

Schottenstein: Oh, isn't that something?

Zelkowitz: Can you imagine? It was Johnny Jones, I called up Johnny Jones that very day and told him that story. And he said, "My Lord," he said, "I hope you don't think I took it." (laughs)

Schottenstein: Oh

Zelkowitz: Because it was so providential.

Schottenstein: It sounded real fishy.

Zelkowitz: I mean it all hap...and I told this story at the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame and I was saying how glad we were that we were robbed, because we had to close down. We were losing money so fast that I was glad to have a reason to close down. They all howled when I said that I'm glad...

Schottenstein: Why was, why were you losing money? I mean, you had a...

Zelkowitz: Well, when you have help that you're paying and you need to, the only money that you make from radio is the time, the commercials you sell. And it was very difficult to sell an FM. There weren't enough people that had FM.

Schottenstein: Sure, so you -n't make the ends meet comfortably.

Zelkowitz: So that's it, and I'll never forget, Lester Smilak who had a clothing store said to me, "Helen, what are you putting in radio for, why aren't you doing TV?" This was at the same time that TV was just crawling. And I said to him, "Lester," I said, "a TV spot is \$1500. How many spots can I rely on you for it?" Why, he said, "I can't afford that." I said, "Well, that's the reason why you...radio."

Schottenstein: There's your answer.

Zelkowitz: That's what went on, but it was a long, hard fight.

Schottenstein: But you got back into radio then, right after...

Zelkowitz: Yes, well, and all of the radio stations called up and offered everything. And of course, but what we needed was our ..., but the funny thing was that the publisher and owner of the newspaper was digging a well in his farm out, and the joke on Main Street was, "Oh Mr. Culbertson, don't bury Helen's transmitter. Give it back to her." (laughs) And it, it became a, a big joke.

Schottenstein: It was a teasing thing.

Zelkowitz: All he was doing was digging a well. But, oh that was...

Schottenstein: Oh, but you got back in business and...

Zerkowitz: Yes, we did. It was

Schottenstein: And got into the black all right.

Zerkowitz: Yes, and then, of course when we got AM, then it was a whole different story. It then became a lucrative business.

Schottenstein: Were you always on the air, Helen, were you always?

Zerkowitz: I did news in the women's world to start with.

Schottenstein: Wasn't it...

Zerkowitz: The main thing though, was that I went out and sold stock. And maybe one share or ten shares for a hundred dollars. I told this one woman, I said, "Listen," she had this little grocery store. I said, "Now I don't want you to put any money in this that you can't afford to lose, because this is FM and we don't know what it's going to do. And I don't want the day to ever come that you would say that I came down here and sold you something." And so gave her that negative sales talk and she peeled off ten one hundred dollar bills and bought ten shares.

Schottenstein: Oh my.

Zerkowitz: With negative selling..

Schottenstein: Did she ever resent it?

Zerkowitz: No she didn't. And then of course, when Charles died, there was maybe twenty or thirty shares outstanding. And Fred Barry wanted to get the estate straightened out, so he paid everybody something for their share.

At that time it wasn't worth too much because this was in 1973.

Schottenstein: Well, you've had so many great stories, Helen. I'm going, are there any more?

Zerkowitz: Oh no, that's it.

Schottenstein: I've really enjoyed listening to you. I -, I - go on and on. I know that you and Charles made a great life for yourselves in Mt. Vernon and established a lot of happy memories there.

Zerkowitz: Yes, we do. And of course, the sheriff is a very good friend of mine. And we have a popular joke. I got my license renewed and I always tell Sheriff Barber to clear the road, I'm coming through. And so...

Schottenstein: (laughs) Get ready for Helen.

Zerkowitz: And so, yes.

Schottenstein: I wanted to ask you, when you started your radio career, was it very unusual for a woman to be in this?

Zerkowitz: Well, I was the only woman, I ruined every joke. I was at the Ohio Broadcasters' meeting and I was the only woman in the room and they would get ready to tell a good joke and they'd look down and there I was sitting in the front row. That just ruined it.

Schottenstein: Oh they, because it was off color?

Zerkowitz: That's it. They wanted to tell a colorful joke, and they're...

Schottenstein: They had respect for you, though.

Zerkowitz: That's right. So

Schottenstein: Okay do you want to wind this up?

Zerkowitz: Yes, it's been a very interesting life and I loved living in Mt. Vernon.

Schottenstein: And you're still there most of the time?

Zerkowitz: And I'm still there. I've lived in the same house for sixty years and I've never thrown anything out.

Schottenstein: Well, there's going to be one big garage sale some day. But, you're waiting for Creekside, I think, here in Columbus. You'll really be down- sizing then. Well, I'm going to wind this up, Helen, if it's, unless Eleanore or you have any more to add.

Zerkowitz: Well, I just appreciate having my sister here. And my sister and I are hoping to get to a wedding in May. We've got a great-niece that's going to get married in Minneapolis and we hope to get to that wedding. We go to, we're professionals for weddings.

Schottenstein: That's what I understand, wheelchair and all, so...

Zerkowitz: That's it.

Schottenstein: I'm sure that you'll get there if it's at all possible. And again, I want to thank you on behalf of the Columbus Jewish

Historical Society for your time.

Yenkin: You want to thank Naomi?

Zelkowitz: Yes, my sister said, "Don't you want to thank Naomi?"

Schottenstein: That's sweet.

Zelkowitz: Naomi, it's so sweet of you to spend time doing this. This is a terrific effort, but for posterity it's tremendous.

Schottenstein: It is, it means a lot to me to have this background and I'm sure that the whole Jewish community will appreciate it. Not just the Jewish community, there are people outside that also are interested. So it means a lot to me too. Thanks again and I'm going to be signing off.

(Transcribed by Susie Stan Appelbaum)

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